out of time

Desire in Atemporal Cinema

todd mcgowan

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Desire in Atemporal Cinema

Todd McGowan

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For Wyk McGowan,
who helps me to exist
out of time

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Preface

The intimate relationship between the cinema and psychoanalysis almost goes without saying. In the same year that the Lumière brothers projected their first films, Sigmund Freud (with Josef Breuer) published the inaugural text of psychoanalytic theory and practice. The projection of *Repas de bébé* (*Baby's Dinner*) and publication of *Studies on Hysteria* in 1895 conjoin cinema and psychoanalysis in a way that becomes fully apparent after the appearance of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900. As many psychoanalytic theorists have noted, cinema provides a public version of dreaming. In the cinema, spectators subject themselves to a series of images arranged in a formal structure that speaks to their desire. Like the dream for Freud, the film is the disguised fulfillment of a wish—or a form of fantasy. Even if films do not have their origin in the unconscious of spectators, the act of watching a film nonetheless requires the activation and engagement of this unconscious.[1] The film that didn't engage the unconscious of spectators would soon be left with none.

Proponents of the theoretical link between cinema and psychoanalysis have understandably remained focused on Freud's early thought, in which he develops the theory of dream interpretation. Following the implications of this theory, the film functions according to the pleasure principle and allows us to interpret culture-wide desires and fantasies through the film's form. Perhaps because of its fecundity,

this approach has left the relationship between Freud's later thought and the cinema relatively unexamined. In 1920, with the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud revolutionized psychoanalytic theory with the introduction of the death drive. In the process, he dramatically revised his own conception of desire by stripping the pleasure principle of its psychic priority. Though he retained the pleasure principle as an explanatory concept, he discovered that "the pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts."[2] Although the tendency of the pleasure principle continues to lead to the elimination of excess excitation, this elimination is no longer an end in itself; instead, it paves the way for the death drive to restore excitation and disrupt the psychic equilibrium that the pleasure principle works to create.

The priority of the death drive relative to the pleasure principle entails a revision of the theory of dreams that Freud himself never works out. If the death drive structures the psyche, then the dream is not simply the fulfillment of a wish but the repetition of a trauma. Though not every dream traumatizes the dreaming subject, every dream does bring the subject back to the loss—and lost object—that originates subjectivity. In this way, the nightmare, which always fit with difficulty into Freud's theory of dream interpretation, comes to seem theoretically comprehensible, and the pleasant dream that fulfills a wish, within the (unrealized) later theory, conceals a hidden repetition of loss. Rather than allowing the subject to realize an unconscious goal, dreams create satisfaction by staging a repetition of the failure to realize this goal. The subject of the death drive finds its satisfaction in failure, not in the successful realization of desire. This turn away from the image of success in Freud's thought involves a complete shift of the theoretical terrain that psychoanalysis occupies.

The link between the cinema and psychoanalysis appears at first glance less firmly entrenched with the introduction of the death drive. Adapting the later theory to the cinema, cinematic images would not simply fulfill an unconscious desire but would also be a site for the repetition of loss. This conception of the cinema runs up against the imaginary plenitude of the cinematic experience, which seems to preclude loss instead of foregrounding it.[3] It also collides with the

basic temporality of the cinema, which tends to move forward in time from an experience of absence toward the realization of the spectator's desire through the presentation of a fantasy object, such as romantic union. But what the theory of the death drive can explain is the role that absence plays in the cinema. Films do not directly reproduce the unbroken time of everyday experience so much as reassemble time through the editing process and even through the projection of images itself. There is a gap in cinematic time in which an absence repeats itself, and this repetition corresponds to that of the death drive. Though most films hide repetition under the cloak of the fantasized realization of desire, some accentuate this repetition and thereby suggest a different form of temporality.

With his conception of the death drive, Freud opens the possibility for a new theory of time. In the early period of his thought, he locates our sense of time in consciousness and insists on the timelessness of the unconscious. This opposition leaves our traditional ideas of temporality intact, even if it subjects our temporal existence to periodic returns of a nontemporal repressed. Time allows us to quiet, at least temporarily, the disruption that unconscious desire registers, and subsequent disruptions will continue to find their solution in time. The resistance of the unconscious to the passing of time does not demand a new theory of time. But the death drive does. The subject of the death drive is incompatible with any ordinary conception of time. For this subject, the future promises not unknown possibilities for fulfilling desire, but new occasions for the repetition of the fundamental loss that defines the subject.

The subject of the death drive becomes atemporal in the sense that time can provide no hope for an alteration of the fundamental problem animating it. Rather than looking forward to a future in which desire might be realized, the subject of the death drive views past, present, and future on the same plane. Recognition of the death drive as the foundation of subjectivity entails an atemporal existence. Because time holds no promise of realizing desire for this subject, time ceases to be the horizon through which it experiences itself or the world. Though time continues to pass—the subject of the death drive is atemporal and not nontemporal—time cannot provide respite from loss and thus loses its fundamental status for subjectivity.

Ironically, it is in the cinema—the most temporally oriented of the arts—that the atemporality of the death drive becomes most visible.

In order to formulate an original understanding of time, the cinema, like psychoanalysis, had to turn away from what seemed most essential to it. The traditional structure of the cinematic experience highlights its temporality: by cutting up time and projecting it at twenty-four frames per second, the cinema creates an almost constant awareness that time is passing. But the fact that cinema must cut up time into static images in order to represent it reveals a hidden potential for atemporality that resides within the cinematic form from its inception. Traditionally, film editing has supported the idea of forward moving temporality by respecting time's arrow. Though there were occasional idiosyncratic challenges to the dominance of temporal editing, such as Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956), it was not until the mid-1990s that the challenge to temporal editing became widespread enough to produce an alternative conception of time in the cinema. In films like Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), Alejandro González Iñárritu's *21 Grams* (2003), Todd Phillips's *The Hangover* (2009), and many others, an atemporal cinema emerges, and the aesthetic structure of this atemporal cinema has its basis in the logic of the death drive. Through its recent turn away from forward-moving temporality, the cinema has once again revealed its bond with psychoanalytic theory. When cinema turns away from time, it turns to the death drive.

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The Origins of the Atemporal Film

THE TEMPORAL REVOLUTION

The fundamental theoretical effort of the twentieth century was the attempt to integrate time into thought. Though there were anticipations of this effort in early centuries, the twentieth century is the époque when concern for time comes to the foreground across disparate intellectual and cultural arenas. This effort did not simply take time as an object of thought but instead worked to reveal the intrinsic temporality of both thought and being. Time had to become a matter of form and not just content. This theoretical endeavor manifested itself from the novels of Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust to Albert Einstein's special and general theories of relativity to the philosophical movements of vitalism and phenomenology. Though time played a role in art, science, and philosophy prior to the twentieth century, it often remained in the background, whereas the twentieth century would insist on its absolute theoretical centrality.

The historical novels of Honoré de Balzac and Walter Scott depict the unfolding of time, but they do not register time directly through their formal structure in the way that Woolf and Proust would. Characters act in time, but the narrators that recount their lives do so from a perspective outside time or only implicitly temporal.[1] This perspective disappears in the Modernist novel. Akin to the early novelists, Isaac Newton grants time a position in classical physics,

but he can grasp it only as an absolute background against which events occur that the physicist works to understand. For Einstein, time becomes a variable that changes according to spatial position and speed of motion, which allows him to see its power in shaping the position from which the physicist knows. Time ceases to be what we know and becomes more explicitly part of how we know. Philosophy undergoes the same type of shift. Even though Immanuel Kant registers time as a form of the subject's experience rather than simply as a known object, he retains the transcendental subject as a reference point not bound by time, in a way that Martin Heidegger would correct by replacing subjectivity with Dasein or being-there, which is an inherently temporal being. In art, science, and philosophy, a shift toward temporality makes itself felt through a series of revolutions in form.[2]

The historical difficulty of integrating time into thought stems from its obscure obviousness. That is, everyone knows what time is, and no one can give a satisfying explanation of it. As Saint Augustine famously puts it, "What then *is* time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know."[3] Time goes without saying but also resists any saying. The attempt to put time into words necessarily leads to paradoxes, such as those of Zeno or John McTaggart. (For Zeno, the flight of an arrow demonstrates the irreconcilability of the instant of time with movement; for McTaggart, the impossibility of defining time without presupposing an understanding of it reveals its unreality.[4]) Time remains paradoxical as long as we view it as an external field to be known rather than as the terrain through which we know. The shift to the latter position occurs in Woolf's stream-of-consciousness narration, in Einstein's conception of temporal relativity, and in Heidegger's understanding of temporality as the necessary condition of our being.[5]

The revolutionary conceptions of time that emerge in the twentieth century all have an implicitly ethical dimension. By integrating temporality into thought, the great figures of the twentieth century work to shatter the isolation of the subject that has plagued modernity since Descartes and open the subject to some form of otherness.[6] Temporal thinking is ethical because it recognizes that the subject is not a self-contained or complete entity but rather an existent that

always surpasses itself and exists outside of itself. It is defined by its incompleteness and thus has an unavoidable involvement with others. This type of thinking also strips away any conception of an authority existing outside of time and not subject to its exigencies. This is why Proust forbids his narrator a position outside time from which he could summarize events of the narrative in the manner of the eighteenth- or nineteenth-century novelist.[7] Though the characters in earlier novels exist in time, the modern novel inserts the narrator and the act of narration into time, a gesture that subverts the narrator's god-like position of authority. Even Einstein's special relativity, which he conceived without any consideration of ethics at all, has an ethical weight insofar as it dethrones an absolute conception of time and grants each locality its own valid time. What Newton theorizes as universally true becomes not invalid but rather locally valid in the universe of special and general relativity.[8]

It is in philosophy, however, that the ethics of temporality becomes most apparent. The great failure of the history of Western philosophy, according to Heidegger, lies in its inability to think temporality as the basis of being itself. This failure produces the idea of stable essences, including that of the subject, that fall into time rather than emerging out of it. As long as we continue to think of time as added to being, we will view ourselves and others as completed objects. In Heidegger's conception, a proper sense of temporality allows us to grasp ourselves as constantly self-transcending. Unlike the traditional subject, Heidegger's Dasein finds its being only through its temporality, which opens it to the otherness of its own future and of other beings. Grasping our temporality permits us to recognize otherness in a way that Western philosophy has been systematically unable to do. This is the ethical valence of the temporal revolution.

Though Heidegger and Henri Bergson conceive of our temporality in ethics terms, Emmanuel Levinas stands out as the spokesperson for the ethics of temporality. Though he played a large role in bringing German phenomenology to France, he reproaches Heidegger and other phenomenologists for failing to see fully the ethical implications of temporality. A grasp of temporality is indissociable from and emerges out of the experience of otherness. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas articulates this link. He points out that "time is not the achievement

of an isolated and lone subject, but . . . the very relationship of the subject with the Other."[9] The encounter with the other and the other's demand on us makes us aware of ourselves as incomplete and thus existing in time. Our responsibility vis-à-vis the other is always a future responsibility—a duty that we must accomplish in time. The other and the future are existentially akin insofar as they force us out of our self-isolation and require our self-transcendence. One's attitude toward time is at once one's attitude toward the other. Someone who uses time or views it as a means to be exploited for profit will take up this same attitude toward the other. Many of the main currents of twentieth-century philosophy are committed to countering this position in all of its manifestations by adopting an ethics of time.

The ethics of time that dominates the twentieth century has a natural home in the most temporal of the arts. According to D. N. Rodowick, "what most powerfully affects us in film is an ethics of time."[10] When we go to the cinema, we submit to an experience that constantly foregrounds the passing of time. Rodowick adds, "an ontological examination of the medium, no matter how variable or unfinished, leads to the surprising conclusion that what we have valued in film are our confrontations with time and time's passing."[11] The cinema teaches us to value time even as it emphasizes time's fleetingness. In this sense, one always goes to the cinema with the other, even when one is alone in the theater. This link between cinema and the twentieth century's ethics of time derives from the intrinsic temporality of the filmic medium.

TIME PASSES

From its inception, cinema has privileged time. The essence and the appeal of the cinematic art are inextricable from the experience of temporality that it offers spectators. Whatever else films explore, they inherently take temporality as their subject due to the nature of the medium. Whatever occurs in the filmic image—or between filmic images—occurs within the temporality of the film's projection. Every film orders time in some fashion or other, and the privileged role that time plays in cinematic art distinguishes film from all other arts. That is, the way that a film orders time shapes its status as a work of art.

The audience experiences painting, sculpture, and photography on its own time. The works of art in these media exist without any intrinsic temporal exigencies, and this allows viewers to observe them at whatever pace is convenient for them. Though literature, drama, and dance appear to emphasize temporality to the same extent that the cinema does—one can't imagine a play that doesn't impose a certain temporal structure on its audience—the role of time in each is contingent rather than necessary. Though reading a poem requires a certain amount of time, nothing regulates the pace of one's reading and thus the allotment of time that the poem demands. Though each performance of a play lasts a specific time, this time is variable and not essential to the play as a work of art. The text of *Hamlet* does not include the time that its performance must take, and the experience of watching a performance of *Hamlet* can remain more or less the same even when the length of the performance changes. The same cannot be said of a film, in which the time must remain the same for each showing.[12] Changing a film's running time—even cutting or adding just a few seconds—effectively changes a film, whereas the performance time of a dance or a play inevitably varies, at least by a few seconds.

The one art that seems to foreground temporality as rigorously as the cinema is music. Musical pieces are organized temporally: an artist composes by distributing different sounds in a temporal order. But like drama and dance, musical pieces can vary according to the performance. One orchestra might take sixty-two minutes to play Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; another might take seventy-four minutes. Though artists often record music, music is not necessarily recorded in the way that cinema is because music can be recorded live, yet there is no such thing as a live performance of a film. The absence of a live recording of a film—its necessarily recorded status—forces every film to thematize time, regardless of whether the film artist wishes it.[13]

Though digital recording and editing have changed some filmic practices, they have not changed the time-based nature of film, and in this sense, one can continue to talk about digitally recorded films as "films," although the term is technically misleading.[14] As Peter Wollen notes, "The important point to note is that film and video,

unlike painting or sculpture, are both explicitly time-based media."[15] The particular arrangement of time constitutes a film as a work of art as much as the visual images that the film presents. Even films that primarily present a series of still images, like Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), nonetheless highlight temporality through their avoidance of the moving image. Every film betrays some particular conception of temporality.[16]

For many theorists, the genius of cinema lies in its ability to permit the spectator an authentic experience of time without the obstacles that confound the experience of time outside the cinema. While watching a film that highlights the movement of time, spectators find themselves submitted to time rather than feeling themselves separated from its movement, which is the position that we tend to occupy in our everyday lives. Film alerts us to the constitutive role that time plays in our existence.[17] In films that produce what Gilles Deleuze calls time-images, time becomes the source of action and movement rather than just the arena in which movement occurs, as it is in what he calls the movement-image. Though he sees the time-image emerging in the post–World War II era with Italian Neorealism and the films of Orson Welles, Deleuze believes that it nonetheless represents the essence of cinematic art.[18] The time-image shows the ontological priority of time by taking the focus away from action that unfolds in chronological or spatialized time. Instead, the spectator experiences time directly through, say, Welles's depth of field, which juxtaposes past and present in a single shot. Early cinema's focus on the priority of movement—evident in films as disparate as the Lumière shorts and Eisenstein's silent masterpieces—represents a false start that serves to set the stage for the modern cinematic revolution that takes the thematization of temporality as its point of departure.

Time passes in the cinema, and the cinematic spectator experiences the flow of time in all its inexorableness. This is what attracts phenomenological and existentialist thinkers to the cinema. They see in the cinematic experience a possible relation to time that will challenge time's usual externality for the subject. Though they may not explicitly align their thinking about film with phenomenology, major film theorists André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer value the

cinema for the phenomenological revelation that it makes possible. The cultural importance of film for each lies not in the ideas that particular films might communicate but in the revelation of the temporality of experience through an experience of temporality. Cinema's inherent thematization of time predisposes filmmakers to focus on transient phenomena—like a plastic bag caught by a swirling wind—because it punctuates their fleetingness and allows the spectator to experience it as such.[19] Film reveals temporality to its spectators by immersing them in it without respite, and as a result, they can experience temporality in a singular way in the cinema. The revelation of the subject's fundamental temporality, for theorists like Bazin and Kracauer, is one of the cinema's chief philosophical tasks, a task that is especially exigent in a modern world that increasingly distorts time and our experience of temporality.[20]

TURNING AWAY FROM TIME

But there is also another possibility for cinema that has become fully visible only with the competition brought by digital technology. As the threat of television in the 1950s produced a reimagining of cinematic space in the form of Cinerama, Cinemascope, and even 3D projection, the digital threat (embodied by videogames, virtual reality, the Internet, and so on) has led to the restructuring of cinematic time. Since the explosion of the digital era in the middle of the 1990s, a new temporal aesthetic in cinema has grown in response, one that approximates the experience of the digital world. Though there have been isolated films (like *Betrayal* [David Hugh Jones, 1983]) that have employed a nonlinear temporality throughout the history of cinema, the contemporary turn away from chronology is both broader and deeper than any historical antecedent. A large group of films has emerged in response to the change in temporality effected by the digital era. This series includes *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), *Eye of God* (Tim Blake Nelson, 1997), *Following* (Christopher Nolan, 1998), *Go* (Doug Liman, 1999), *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001), *Ju-On* (Takashi Shimizu, 2002), *11:14* (Greg Marcks, 2003), *The Machinist* (Brad Anderson, 2004), *The Three Burials of*

Melquiades Estrada (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005), *Shi gan* (*Time*, Kim Ki-duk, 2006), *I'm Not There* (Todd Haynes, 2007), and *The Girlfriend Experience* (Steven Soderbergh, 2009). Rather than providing an experience of the forward movement of time, these films scramble temporality through the creation of a narrative structure that defies a forward moving chronology.[21]

Though the flashback and flash forward have been staples of cinema since early in the talkie era, these devices have traditionally occurred within a typical chronology. They functioned as clearly marked detours along a linear chronological path that moved toward the future. Rather than subverting a sense of the temporal movement of a film, the use of flashback and flash forward have tended to emphasize temporality. The flashbacks in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), for instance, reveal the movement of time through the changing image of Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles). And in film noir, flashback works to define the pastness—and thus the fated nature—of the events depicted. More dramatic departures from chronology have appeared in science fiction films, such as the five films of the *Planet of the Apes* series or Tim Burton's 2001 remake of the first one.[22] These films and numerous others of the genre depict time breaking from typical linearity and looping back on itself. But in each case the disturbance in cinematic time is simply a manifestation of a disturbance of time within the story. It is typically driven by concerns for content rather than form, and it conforms to the expectations of the genre. What stands out about the group of contemporary films that adopt an atemporal narrative structure is their distance from science fiction as a genre.

The atemporal cinematic mode does not distort forward-moving time simply because of the demands of story, as is the case with science fiction. Its distortions are instead formal ones. The distortion of time takes place in the filmic discourse (what Russian Formalism calls the *syuzhet*); that is, it occurs in the way that the story (or *fabula*) is told, not in the story itself. Some implicit version of this distortion is present in every film that involved editing or even projection, as both processes take time apart and reassemble it. In this sense, the possibility for an atemporal cinema has always existed alongside cinema's aesthetic commitment to temporality. But with

the atemporal mode, cinema's manipulation of time becomes evident and thematically resonant.

Though sometimes the films in the atemporal mode depict stories in which time becomes distorted (as it does in science fiction time travel narratives), the distortion of the filmic discourse in atemporal cinema always goes beyond and amplifies that of the story. With these films, the story's temporal distortion cannot fully explain that of the filmic discourse. This is evident in the case of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004), where a procedure for erasing memories in the story disrupts the diegetic time (or the time of the film's story). *Eternal Sunshine* belongs to the atemporal mode because its discourse doesn't just recount the jumbled time of the story in the manner of *Planet of the Apes* but creates an excess temporal distortion beyond what the story requires. When the discourse simply follows the temporal distortion of the story, it does not challenge the temporal structure of the cinema itself. Science fiction films show time travel happening and allow spectators to observe it; atemporal cinema enacts the distortion of time and forces the spectator to experience this distortion through the act of watching the film. Watching these films involves living through a temporal confusion.

In some cases, this distinction becomes difficult to sustain. In *The Lake House* (Alejandro Agresti, 2006), for example, the depiction of two different times existing simultaneously is the story, but the way that the film shows these two times as coexisting is part of the filmic discourse. In order to follow the story, the discourse must deviate from the temporal nature of typical filmic discourse. This breakdown between story and discourse becomes even more pronounced with the films of David Lynch. In *Lost Highway* (1997), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and *Inland Empire* (2006), the story itself involves time looping around and moving in a circular fashion. But in the act of expressing this story, the discourse itself must undergo a profound transformation. Like *The Lake House*, Lynch's films both belong and don't belong to the atemporal cinematic mode because the atemporal discourse is the result of the exigencies of specific stories that involve the distortion of time.[23]

What unites the key films in the atemporal mode is the attempt to introduce spectators to an alternative way of experiencing existence

in time—or, more exactly, a way of experiencing existence outside of our usual conception of time. Time in these films doesn't bring about a different future but instead an incessant repetition. Despite their generic and thematic diversity, the distortion of chronological time in these films has a shared motivation: in each case, they distort time not simply because of the exigencies of plot but in order to reveal the circular logic of what psychoanalysis calls the drive. Contemporary atemporal cinema is a cinema of the drive, in which narrative is oriented around a foundational moment of traumatic loss. Understanding this cinema requires grasping this fundamental psychoanalytic idea.

THE DRIVE'S PHILOSOPHY OF TIME

Even more than the unconscious (which has received much more attention), the drive perhaps constitutes the essence of psychoanalytic thought. As Freud sees it, the drive is the result of the collision between the instincts of the biological organism and the demands of the social order that confront this organism. The subject that this collision produces is neither a purely biological entity (governed by instincts) nor a purely cultural identity (constructed by the presuppositions of the social order). By insisting on the foundational status of the drive for the subject, psychoanalysis opts for a third way between a biological understanding and a cultural one. But this third way is not simply a merging of biology and culture. The collision between nature and culture produces a subject who is no longer at home in the natural world and is at the same time alienated in the world of culture. The drive separates the subject from both nature and culture.

The social order constitutes itself by confronting each individual who enters it with a demand for the sacrifice of existence without restriction. Entering society means accepting that one cannot do just as one pleases. The loss of unrestricted existence that occurs when one enters society forms the subject of the drive. But the initial loss has a deceptive appearance that distorts the subject's experience of the drive. It appears to the subject as if it has lost something substantial—that the unrestricted existence it has sacrificed holds the ultimate enjoyment—and thus the subject searches for the object that

might return it to this mythic time. In fact, the loss is itself primordial and constitutive for the subject, which is why every attempt to return fails. No subjectivity exists prior to this structuring loss.

Psychoanalytic thought distinguishes between the concepts of desire and drive in order to differentiate two possible attitudes toward the initial loss. Desire is predicated on the belief that it is possible to regain the lost object and thereby discover the ultimate enjoyment. Desire represents a belief that a satisfying object exists and can be obtained. In contrast, the drive locates enjoyment in the movement of return itself—the repetition of the loss, rather than in what might be recovered. As Adrian Johnston puts it, "drives come to enjoy the very failure to reach the impossible goal, whereas desire is permanently dissatisfied with the inaccessibility of its goal."[24] Our desire runs up against a perpetual stumbling block: when we obtain the object that we desire, we do not discover satisfaction but another object to desire. This continual frustration of desire—this failure to obtain the truly satisfying object—is the precise way that the drive satisfies itself. Through the drive, the subject finds satisfaction in the repetition of the failure and loss that initially constitutes it.

From the perspective of the drive, the goal or object that it seeks is nothing but a tool for facilitating repetition, which is where enjoyment actually lies. We require the deception of the pleasurable goal in order to submit to the enjoyment of the repetition of loss. In "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," Freud makes an important distinction between the aim of a drive and its object. Though the aim, according to Freud, "is in every instance satisfaction," the object is "the thing in regard to which or through which" the drive finds this satisfaction.[25] The drive doesn't achieve satisfaction by obtaining the object but through the act of failing to obtain it. The object promises to rectify our sense of loss, but our aim is altogether different. The pursuit of the lost object serves as an alibi for the repetition of loss and the satisfaction that this repetition provides. The desire for the lost object hides the drive to repeat its loss.

The idea that the subject might find satisfaction in the repetition of loss appears bizarre at first glance. Obviously, people are consciously trying to succeed at what they do. Our entire conscious life operates around the idea of avoiding loss and successfully obtaining

more objects. We associate enjoyment with acquisition in some form or other—acquisition of money, of a romantic partner, of a new job, of peacefulness, of friends, and so on. Though we take a fleeting pleasure in success, we can enjoy loss—and only loss—because it is only through loss that we emerge as desiring beings. The repetition of the loss that constitutes our subjectivity brings satisfaction because it returns us to our lost object, an object that ceases to exist once we have it. Subjects find their successes unsatisfying—even the most successful are constantly looking elsewhere—insofar as successfully having our object has the effect of destroying it as a lost object and thus as desirable.

The fact of the drive—and psychoanalytic thought in general—demands an atemporal attitude. In this sense, psychoanalysis represents a countercurrent to the major movements of twentieth century thought. Rather than affirming the primacy of time, it insists on the subject's resistance to temporal change.[26] The repetition of the drive provides the foundational horizon for the subject, and no amount of time will allow the subject to transcend this horizon. The only possibility that the future offers is that of a new form of repetition. Although one can change jobs or lovers, one cannot change the fundamental structure of one's subjectivity. The point is not that time is just an illusion (as it is for Parmenides and the Eleatic philosophers) or that it is just a form of appearance (as it is for Plato) but that time does not hold within it the promise of openness and difference.

Escaping the lure of this promise requires thinking atemporally because the promise inheres within the very idea of time. As Yuval Dolev notes, even those who insist on the determined and fixed nature of the future implicitly assume its fundamental openness. In *Time and Realism*, Dolev contends, "It's a feature of *time* that the past is fixed and the future open. It's against this fact that doctrines can be conjured up that would render the past mutable and the future fixed."[27] As long as we think in terms of temporality, we cannot escape the image of a future full of possibilities, even if we theoretically explain it away. That is to say, we cannot accede to the logic of the drive and remain caught within the lures of desire. When we desire, we look to the future as the time in which we will obtain the

object and fulfill our desire. Time, like desire, provides respite from the interminable nature of the drive.

It is not enough to take a tenseless approach to time, as many philosophers of time have done. According to the tenseless view, past, present, and future have no real status but exist only as convenient tools for our communication with each other. The only real temporal distinctions are relational ones—earlier, later, and simultaneous.[28] Bertrand Russell is the most famous exponent of this position. He attributes past, present, and future to the experience of a perceiving subject, while relations of earlier and later, as he sees it, occur objectively. But even Russell and his followers allow that in our daily practice we cannot avoid taking up a different attitude toward the past and the future in which the future can provide possibilities that the past cannot.[29] Tenseless philosophy affirms temporal succession even as it denies the reality of tense, and succession—the difference between earlier and later—misses the logic of the drive.

The rejection of the idea of an open future that occurs with the logic of the drive seems to imply a rejection of human freedom. If the future cannot be fundamentally different from the past, then there is no opportunity for freedom to intervene in the course of events in order to alter them. The idea of freedom appears to depend on the acceptance of temporality. But the logic of the drive does not lead inevitably to determinism. It is, instead, the foundation of a philosophy of freedom. As Kant recognizes, we are not free in time but out of it. He sees only unfreedom in the phenomenal self that exists in time. As long as we consider ourselves purely temporal beings, we will remain caught up in a matrix of causes and effects that leaves no room for freedom, which requires positing the existence of a noumenal self outside of time.[30]

Similarly, the atemporality of the drive resists the causality of time by rupturing it with the assertion of subjectivity. The drive's repetition is at once the subject's insistence on its own path and its refusal to submit to the reign of causality that governs time. Without the drive, without this repetition of loss that marks our entrance into society, we would have no means for resisting the determining power of causality. For Alenka Zupančič, the drive is "precisely the effect of a dysfunction in the purely linear causality."[31] Our attraction to loss

allows us to act contrary to our own interests, to defy the pleasure principle, to interrupt the causality that determines us. The atemporality of the drive allows us to act freely and thus serves as the basis for ethics.

ATEMPORAL ETHICS

Temporality represents a refuge from the inevitable nature of the repetition of loss. Both the tensed and tenseless philosophers of time reveal this through their tendency to explain our experience of time by utilizing the contrast between relief and dread. Although we feel relief when traumatic events are in the past, so this line of thought goes, we dread the future occurrence of such events. A. N. Prior defends the tensed theory of time by pointing out that the tensed statement of relief is irreducible to any relational (and tenseless) alternative. He notes that the statement "'Thank goodness that's over!' . . . says something which it is impossible" to convey in a tenseless way.[32] Regardless of whether this is the case, philosophers of time on both sides have accepted Prior's basic contention that we experience relief when a traumatic event becomes past. The fact that relief plays such a prominent and unquestioned role in arguments about time indicates most forcefully the opposition between temporality and the logic of the drive. The drive allows for no relief: its burden on the subject is never past, and the future holds no promise for escape from it.

We turn to time in order to be able to hope that we will overcome loss, but no amount of time allows us to escape the hold that loss has over us. A new job or a new house may represent a radical transformation, but it won't change the subject's relationship to its lost object. Rather than escaping loss, we will repeat it and reenact it, because this repetition, even though it isn't pleasing to us, holds the secret to our enjoyment. Time promises the possibility of a pleasing escape, but this is a false promise. Though cinema has been implicated in this promise, there have always been countercurrents within cinematic history, and the atemporal mode brings cinema's ability to disrupt time into the foreground. The close relationship between film and the experience of time is explicitly displaced as these films thrust the spectator into the logic of the drive and its repetition of loss.

The ethical thrust of atemporal cinema stems from its investment in the repetition of the drive at the expense of temporality. The drive houses the subject's ethical being because it provides constant contact with loss and absence, a contact that forms the basis of our relation to others.[33] What we have in common is what we don't have rather than anything we do. Though their experiences differ infinitely, all subjects share a basis in loss. Even though a fundamental loss isolates us within our subjectivity, it also provides the only possible basis for connection. Loss is our common constitutive event. The repetition of the drive continually reacquaints us with this event and thus facilitates an ethical relationship to others in which the subject is obligated through the shared structuring loss.

Though historically cinema played a central role in propagating the ethics of time that animated much twentieth-century thought, atemporal cinema breaks from this association and turns the ethics of time on its head. It locates the ethical position not in submitting to an authentic temporality but in rejecting the notion of temporal difference altogether. Though time may strip away the subject's isolation, it also implicitly suggests the possibility of overcoming loss, and it is the attempt to move ahead in time and get beyond loss—the attempt to attain wholeness or completion—that is the basis for unethical activity. When Heidegger emphasizes how temporality permits Dasein's self-transcendence or Levinas focuses on how time marks the opening of the subject to alterity, they do not view time as a way to escape loss, but their commitment to temporality necessarily leads in this direction. The being who is aware of its temporality and who considers time as the source of otherness cannot avoid the idea that the loss animating its present condition might be eliminated or ameliorated.

Rather than leading us in the direction of ethics, the focus on time produces an investment in a future pregnant with possibility, including the possibility of escaping loss. An investment in time implicitly carries with it the promise of a better future, even for those who reject any transcendence. The possibility of ameliorating the traumatic loss that constitutes us leads us to treat others (and ourselves) as mere means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. This possibility provides the basis for a consequentialist outlook in which

others become the means for overcoming loss, and their singularity as subjects evaporates. This is why Kant insists that treating others as mere means to an end is treating them immorally. He famously defines the moral law as the avoidance of this: "*So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*."[34] This position more accessible when one becomes a subject of the drive.

The subject of the drive reverses the relationship between means and ends. The end for this subject—the object of desire—becomes a means for sustaining the drive rather than a source of satisfaction in itself. I seek out a box of candy not for the satisfaction that would come from the actual eating of it but for the satisfaction that comes from seeking out the box of candy, and eating it functions as a means for continuing to seek it. The pleasure in the act of eating no longer exists as distinct from the search for this pleasure. For the subject of the drive, the means becomes the end. This subject uses temporal goals as a way of sustaining the repetition of the drive rather than using the drive to achieve temporal goals. In this way, the drive inverts the commonsensical and consequentialist thinking that dominates our typical approach to the world and to ethics. Rather than valuing the end result or ultimate good, one values the means by which one arrives at this result. From this perspective, someone's significance no longer lies in the use to which they might be put. Getting beyond temporality—which means getting beyond our very ability to get beyond traumatic loss—is the key to approaching others in their singularity rather than reducing this singularity to a tool serving a greater purpose. One treats others and oneself ethically only when one is out of time, and contemporary atemporal cinema works to place us in this position.[35]

THE CODE

Almost all of the films of the atemporal mode show the ethical nature of the drive, but it becomes especially evident in Michael Haneke's *Code Inconnu* (*Code Unknown*, 2000). Given the title of the film and what happens in the various scenes, *Code Unknown* would appear to be an exploration of an absence of ethical relations or of relations as such.

No one knows the code that would unlock the secret of someone else, and everyone remains a fundamental mystery to each other within the film's reality. Haneke depicts a series of misunderstandings or failures to understand, each a few minutes in length and occurring without a clear chronology that unites them together. There are no cuts within the scenes, but each one ends with a hard cut to a few seconds of a black screen, after which the next scene commences.[36] The film leaves the connection between the scenes ambiguous for the spectator: though the same characters appear in the different scenes, neither the movement of time nor the flow of events unites the scenes that follow each other. Whereas within each scene a strict forward moving temporality governs the action (which occurs in real time due to the use of the single shot), the relationship between the scenes—which is also the relationship between the shots—shows no deference to a linear chronology. The experience within the diegetic reality is opposed to that of the spectator watching the film. Time for the spectator is cut up and loops back on itself, whereas time flows uninterrupted for the characters within each scene.

Many films use editing, shot composition, or other formal techniques to recreate the experience that dominates within the film's diegetic reality. There is a wide variety of examples of this practice in the history of cinema. For instance, in *Vivre sa vie* (1962), Jean-Luc Godard's division of the film into twelve discrete sections produces for the spectator the episodic and disconnected life of Nana (Anna Karina). In a radically different case, Francis Ford Coppola manipulates the audio track of *The Conversation* (1974) in order to produce the paranoia in the spectator that Harry Caul (Gene Hackman) experiences in the film. And in yet another variant, Spike Lee uses a montage sequence of characters speaking ethnic slurs directly to the camera in *Do the Right Thing* (1989) as a way of approximating the charged atmosphere of the Brooklyn neighborhood depicted in the film. These films and uncountable others enact an homology between content and form; that is, the experience of the form allows the spectator to grasp the meaning of the content. Haneke's film proceeds in the opposite direction.

Code Unknown associates misunderstanding and disconnection with the forward moving temporality that occurs within the scenes,

and it associates understanding and connection with the interruption of temporality that exists between them. Within each scene, the unknown code represents the barrier to ethical subjectivity. Characters continually misunderstand each other and do excessive violence to each other as a result of this misunderstanding. In the second scene of the film, the police arrest Amadou (Ona Lu Yenke) for creating a public disturbance when he is actually the one character in the scene attempting to act ethically. Like the deaf children playing charades at the beginning and end of the film, the police—and all the other people in the scene—cannot crack the code of Amadou's act. Their racism leads them to see him as threatening rather than as conscientious. In this scene, racism is a large part of the barrier between characters, but the barrier remains when the racial dynamics change in subsequent scenes. The film ends with Georges (Theirry Neuvic) being locked out of the apartment that he shares with Anne (Juliette Binoche); here, there is no racial tension, but there is nonetheless another misconnection.

The misunderstandings depicted within the film are inextricable from the temporality in which they unfold. The unrelenting forward movement of each shot/scene allows for no experience of constitutive loss or absence, and all the characters in the film inhabit this universe of pure temporality. Time presses forward and affords no opportunity to experience loss as such. The absence of a cut in the scenes mirrors the sense of time pressing in the filmic content. Within certain scenes, however, characters try to create instances of loss in order to break out of this inexorable temporality. The Father (Josef Bierbichler) senselessly kills his own cattle, and Amadou's friend (Florence Loiret) discards her watch into an ashtray after Amadou responds indifferently to it. But these acts of sacrifice do not go far enough to change the operative relationship to time in the diegetic reality. It is only through the cuts between the scenes—that is, in the experience of the spectator, not that of the characters in the film—that a constitutive absence emerges.

The unknown code acts as a barrier to understanding and connection in the diegesis; it provides the source of understanding and connection for the spectator watching the film. Spectators can make sense of the film despite the absence of temporal continuity in

the narrative structure. This sense derives from the way that the hard cut to the black screen punctuates each scene and gives the scene its significance within the film.[37] The gap within the filmic discourse—the black screen, the unknown code—bonds the scenes and the characters together for the spectator. The point at which the filmic discourse interrupts the story becomes the key to understanding the story.

In the same sense, the unconscious, which interrupts the flow of meaning in our everyday interactions and thus separates us from each other, is at once the sole basis for a connection with each other. Without the unconscious interruption, we would have no access to the other's desire. The unconscious blocks meaning at the same time that it opens up another plane of understanding. Without the interruption or moment of loss in the experience of watching *Code Unknown*, the spectator would be left in the same position as the characters within the diegetic reality—blocked by the unknown code rather than enabled by it. The atemporality of the filmic discourse allows for connections that the temporality of the diegesis excludes. The spectator has an ethical possibility that does not exist for the characters. In this sense, *Code Unknown* lays out wager of the atemporal mode with the utmost clarity: it locates the ethics of the drive in the turn away from cinematic chronological temporality.

The juxtaposition of a strict chronological temporality within each scene and an atemporal structure between the scenes marks the genius of *Code Unknown*. The moments of black screen that connect the various scenes allow the spectator to understand what's happening in a way that the characters within the film, who don't have the advantage of any gaps within the forward movement of time, cannot. By predicating understanding on the break from temporality, the film makes explicit the association of ethics and loss that the atemporal mode as such propagates. The repetition of loss in the drive occurs in time but without regard to it. No amount of time frees the subject from this repetition. But constitutive loss is not just the source of trauma; it is also the source of understanding and connection.

By reorienting the spectator's experience of temporality in the way that *Code Unknown* does, atemporal cinema enacts a spatialization of time. Philosophers and social critics have historically identified the spatialization of time with exploitation and regimentation. But

the atemporal cinematic mode challenges this identification and makes the case for an ethical possibility inherent in the spatialization of time. The films in this mode take the spatialization of time as their point of departure, but they do so in order to reveal what is more foundational for the subject than time. In this way, they show how the spatialization of time might lead to an ethical possibility that at first it appears to occlude entirely.

THE SPATIALIZATION OF TIME

Thinkers from across the political spectrum have condemned the spatialization of time for its injurious effects on our ethical and political being. The spatialization of time began with the invention of the simplest clock—the sundial or the water clock—that transforms time by measuring it in terms of space. Once measured in this way, time ceases to be the experience of duration and takes on the attributes of distance. The future becomes equivalent to a faraway place toward which one is traveling, and the past becomes equivalent to the place left behind. It is theoretically appropriate that the exigencies of movement in space (specifically, sea navigation) have acted as the chief motivation for advances in timekeeping. The clock is nothing but an objective correlative of the desire to spatialize time. Once the spatial model intrudes, it dominates the experience of temporality, leaving the subject unable to consider time in terms other than spatial ones.

With the modern clock, this transformation is clearly evident: time passes when the hands of the clock move. As a result, movement defines temporality, rather than the other way around.[38] And this movement, especially with clocks that don't have a sweeping second hand or with digital clocks or with the swinging of a pendulum, occurs through completely regularized intervals. Time on the clock is nothing but movement and is, due to its complete spatialization, totally regimented. The possibility of the unexpected and unknown moment, which is always potentially just ahead in time, ceases to exist when the clock serves as the mode for expressing temporality.[39]

The regulation of time undergoes an exponential leap forward with the birth of the capitalist mode of production, an event that coincides roughly with the emergence of the modern clock. The demands

that capitalist mass production makes on workers require that they begin to conceive of time in spatial terms. Workers must arrive at the factory at a precise time each day, must work for a specified number of hours, and must leave at a certain time as well. There is no room within the capitalist work schedule for the experience of time outside of the strictly regulated spatialization that the factory forces on workers, as Charlie Chaplin so effectively satirizes in the opening of *Modern Times* (1936). But this spatialization goes far beyond the factory and infiltrates every aspect of the capitalist subject's temporal existence. One cannot invest oneself in the spatialization of time at work while experiencing an authentic temporality at home. Everything within capitalist society—sleeping, eating, parenting, and even enjoying oneself—runs according to the logic of spatialized time.

Capitalism treats time as an entity that can be broken up into discrete parts in order that it might be bought, sold, and used. Time becomes a quantity rather than a qualitative experience in the process of reification. Reification transforms the temporality (and the labor) of the production process into the spatial form of a commodity. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukács elaborates on the deformation that time undergoes with the transition to a capitalist economy. According to Lukács, "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space."[40] Under capitalist relations of production, one ceases to live time and begins to have it. Workers have their time that they sell, while consumers have their time free to purchase commodities, and everyone spends their time. The emergence of capitalist ideology spatializes time by transforming it into another form of property.

The debilitating effects of the capitalist spatialization of time occasion romantic reactions against it, like that of Henry David Thoreau, who exhorts his readers to simplify their lives and live according to their own pace. But such reactions have had limited success against the march of the capitalist system. The spatialization of time makes itself felt in the very core of capitalist production through the creation of surplus value. In order to create and realize surplus

value, capitalists, every bit as much as workers, must treat time as space. Time presents a problem for the capitalist eager to create surplus value because of time's finitude for human beings. The working day represents a limit for capital's ability to create surplus value: even under the harshest conditions and with the minimization of necessary labor time, there is a natural limit to the number of hours in a day that a worker can devote to surplus labor. All workers must sleep and eat in order to reproduce themselves as workers.

But by spatializing the working day, the capitalist evades the seemingly intractable limit that times poses. As Marx notes in the *Grundrisse*,

> But the working day, regarded spatially—time itself regarded as space—is *many working days alongside one another*. The more working days capital can enter into exchange with at once, during which it exchanges *objectified for living labour*, the greater its realization *at once*. It can leap over the *natural* limit formed by one individual's living, working day, *at a given stage in the development of the forces of production* (and it does not in itself change anything that this stage is changing) only by positing *another* working day alongside the *first* at the same time—by the spatial addition of *more simultaneous working days*. E.g. I can drive the surplus labour of A no higher than 3 hours; but if I add the days of B, C, D etc., then it becomes 12 hours. In place of a surplus time of 3, I have created one of 12.[41]

According to the logic necessitated by capitalism, one vanquishes the unsurpassable temporality of the working day—and thus increases the possibilities for the creation of surplus value—by spatializing it and thereby transforming the single working day (or successive working days) into multiple ones that coexist alongside each other. In order to increase the percentage of surplus labor in relation to necessary labor, the capitalist must treat temporal limits as spatial ones. One can overcome the limits of space where one cannot overcome the limits of time, but one does so only at the cost of depriving everyone of more and more time.

Capitalism cannot function as an economic system without this constant expansion, an expansion that depends on the increasing spatialization of time. Capitalists sustain their rate of profit by increasing the percentage of surplus labor and decreasing the percentage of necessary labor, which increases the rate of surplus value. A stable rate of surplus value would precipitate a catastrophe for the system because it would leave capitalists without the capital required to reproduce themselves as capitalists. The excess created by capitalism's constant expansion is what sustains the capitalist system. It is, in fact, the genius of capitalism that it lives on excess rather than drowning in it or sacrificing it, as traditional societies did, and it produces this excess principally through the spatialization of time.

The problem with the spatialization of time stems not just from its role in exacerbating the exploitation of the working class but also its manner of deforming existence itself and thereby depriving not only the working class but all subjects of the possibility for freedom. The two great critics of capitalism's spatialization of time are both decidedly not Marxist in their orientation. In different ways, Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger both see how capitalist modernity has eviscerated the experience of time by transforming it into space, and they speculate on the deleterious effects of this transformation on human freedom.[42]

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SPACE

For Bergson, spatializing time blinds us to time's absolute heterogeneity, to the newness inherent in the continuum of time. When we repress the awareness of our temporality by spatializing it, we allow the spatiality of the external world to dictate our actions rather than acting freely from within time, which is internal to us. Bergson contends that "our life unfolds in space rather than in time; we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we 'are acted' rather than act ourselves. To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration."[43] Spatial existence is necessarily existence at the behest of an external authority; temporality or duration allows the subject to break from this authority. When one exists in an authentic temporality, one is

not looking to validate or justify one's being. Bergson thus identifies freedom with the act of situating oneself in time and existing as a pure duration.

Heidegger's critique of the spatialization of time focuses less directly on the effects of this process on human freedom, though this is ultimately a central reason for his concern. Heidegger indicts the history of Western thought for producing an inauthentic conception of time in which time is reduced to a series of discrete moments (or a series of nows), which is the error that leads to Zeno's paradoxes. The wrongheaded idea of the subject itself—a self-identical timeless being that falls into time as a milieu exterior to it—is the inevitable product of an inauthentic temporality. As Heidegger sees it, there is no subject at all because Dasein (the one being that has the ability to question its own being because of its self-transcending structure) is irretrievably identified with temporality and has no essence outside of time. But when Dasein spatializes time and thereby conceives of itself as a subject and as having an essence, it loses touch with itself because it is defined by nothing but its authentic temporality. The deception of subjectivity alienates Dasein from its own finitude and gives Dasein over to an anonymous public. In this sense, there is, despite their profound philosophical differences, a fundamental link between Heidegger's critique of the spatialization of time and Bergson's. In both cases, the failure to experience time in its own form leaves one within the domain of an external authority.

Though neither Bergson nor Heidegger align themselves in any way with the Marxist project, they both effectuate a critique of the underlying logic of capitalism proximate to that of Marx. The spatialization of time coincides with the workers' loss of the surplus that they produce, and this loss is a loss of freedom. As Marx conceives it in the third volume of *Capital*, the realm of freedom exists on the basis of the realm of necessity, just as surplus labor exists on the basis of necessary labor. Without some necessary labor, there would be no surplus labor, and without a fully realized realm of necessity, there would be no realm of freedom. Surplus labor parallels the realm of freedom: freedom is the result of an excess that human productivity unleashes; a society without excess production would be a society without any freedom at all. The expropriation of the workers' surplus

labor by capitalists for the sake of profit is effectively the theft of the workers' freedom, as freedom is located in the production of excess. The spatialization of time is destruction of freedom, a destruction that now proceeds unabated.

The critiques that Bergson and Heidegger make concerning the spatialization of time today seem at once quaint and more significant than ever. If the exigencies of the onset of capitalism pushed the spatialization of time forward dramatically, the digital era appears even more revolutionary in this regard. Digital technology eviscerates the experience of authentic temporality, leaving contemporary subjects adrift in the experience of an eternal present. The capacity of this technology for retaining the past without losing any of its details completes the spatialization of time. Whereas time presents us with insurmountable obstacles—no amount of effort can force time to move backward, for instance—space offers us distances that we can traverse, given the technology and the time. Through the use of digital technology, every temporal limit disappears into a spatial one. The question of apprehending all the details of a historical moment becomes a question of storage space rather than one of time.

The difference between analogue and digital recording illustrates the extent of the transformation that has taken place. Analogue recording devices communicate the passing of time through the breakdown of the recording medium. The quality of a tape deteriorates over time, which allows listeners to have some experience of temporality even as the recording attempts to defy it and preserve the present of the recorded event.[44] Because it is infinitely transferable without a loss in quality, a digital recording does not deteriorate and thus does not communicate any experience of temporality. A digital recording made twenty years and a digital recording made twenty minutes ago are indistinguishable for the listener.

But it is not just in the absence of deterioration that the full spatialization of time makes itself felt today. It consumes every arena of contemporary life. The existence of the Internet ensures that one never has to wait for information. One can hear or read commentary on an event without waiting for the event to end. Facebook and Twitter permit instant updates concerning the activities of our friends and acquaintances, so that we never have to wait for

a phone call, a letter, or a personal visit to find out what they're doing. Twenty-four-hour television news coverage allows us to watch history unfold in real time rather than listening to stories about it after the fact.[45] Most Americans watched the towers of the World Trade Center fall as they were actually falling, for instance, rather than seeing it happen on tape or hearing about it after the fact. The temporal immediacy of contemporary life signifies the absence of any experience of time. Time is what we experience when we are forced to wait, when we rely on stories of what has happened, and when we encounter an absolute limit in any form. There is a lessening of temporality in the digital universe, and the time stamps that appear on our digital images or recordings play the role of fetishes obscuring time's increasing absence.

THE END OF IMPOSSIBILITY

The evanescence of time as a limit in the digital era has the potential to inaugurate a fundamental change in the subject of desire. The subject's desire depends on a temporal distance between the desiring subject and the object desired. Time inserts itself between the desiring subject and the object that would appear to satisfy that desire: desire exists in the interval between an initial awareness of the object of desire and the moment of obtaining that object. This temporal distance is essential for nourishing desire because it allows the subject to believe that the realization of desire is a future possibility. I recognize that I don't have what I want right now, but I can see the realization of my desire in the future. Though this future never comes—one obtains objects but never *the* object—and the subject's desire necessarily remains unrealized, the idea that desire might be realized has the effect of keeping desire alive, which is crucial to the functioning of capitalism as a socioeconomic system.

Capitalism is able to grab hold of subjects because it appeals to them on the level of desire, and the consumer of capitalist goods is the archetypal subject of desire. Writing itself on top of the structure of desiring subjectivity, capitalism profits from the nature of desire itself in order to continually expand itself and secure its position as seeming the only socioeconomic alternative today. Capitalism depends on

subjects who believe that consumption will provide them with objects that will answer their desires, and this belief is dependent on the idea that the subject's lost object, the object that would bring the ultimate satisfaction, is accessible. The promise of the accessibility of the lost object—not the accessibility itself—is the key to producing subjects invested in the consumption of more and more commodities. The fact that every commodity disappoints and fails to deliver the lost object has historically strengthened the psychic investment in capitalism rather than attenuating it. The more the commodity fails, the more consumers invest themselves in the future and in the commodities to come. But this investment depends on not recognizing the inevitability of the failure, which is a possibility that digital technology inaugurates.

Digital technology has the effect of eliminating all barriers between the subject and the object of desire. Within the digital universe, there is no barrier that one cannot overcome. This is the case even with the relatively primitive activity of surfing the Internet. The existence of the Internet as a resource for information and knowledge provides instant access to anything one wants to know. As a result, the experience of desiring to recover some piece of lost information increasingly becomes impossible to sustain. For instance, while teaching George Stevens's Western *Shane* (1953), I remembered a contemporary film in which banter takes place concerning the fate of Shane at the end of the film. I spent a few minutes trying to recall the film and then asked a colleague if he could help me. Though he didn't know the answer, he knew that simply entering "Shane" and "ending" on an Internet search would quickly produce the answer—and it did. Rather than spending days thinking about the possibilities and asking other friends, the Internet provided an instant resolution and thereby diminished the importance of the object. I knew the answer, but I lost the object. I experienced the fleeting pleasure of finding the correct answer instead of the prolonged satisfaction of desiring it, and the fleeting pleasure revealed the emptiness of the object. This resolution and others like it make immediately evident the gap between the satisfaction that one expects from desire's realization and that which one receives.

A similar elimination of the time for desiring operates in viewing films at home, as each technological development lessens the

time lag between a desire and its realization. Prior to the invention of the VCR, one had to wait for a desired film to appear on television. In the 1980s, the emergence of the video store permitted one to have quick access to the object. But the birth of on-demand technology in recent years completely eliminates the gap between desire and the object. As was the case with the allusion to *Shane*, on-demand technology has the effect of deflating the object by rendering it immediately accessible. When one can have any film at any time, each individual film loses much of its sublimity.

The point is not that desire suffocates through instantly obtaining its object but that it becomes increasingly difficult to invest oneself in the project of desire when one recognizes that the object will never be *the* object, that the object of desire will never bring the satisfaction that it promises. Instant access to the object has the effect of revealing the object's insignificance for desiring subjectivity, if we pay attention to this diminution of the object. If no object can satisfy desire, desire must proceed for its own sake, which means that it must become drive. The drive is what remains of desire after the image of realization has been stripped away. It is desire without the hope of obtaining the object, desire that has become indifferent to its object. The spatialization of time through digital technology creates access to the atemporality of the drive, an atemporality in which the future holds no possibility for the realization of desire. Subjects who recognize the atemporality of the drive cease to relate to the world primarily as consumers (which is not to say, of course, that they stop buying things altogether).[46]

Capitalism's spatialization of time has created a condition in which the temporality necessary for the reproduction of consumers has become minimized. The development of digital technology creates the possibility for the transformation of the subject of desire on which capitalist relations of production depend. The immediacy created by digital technology plants the seeds for the recognition of the subject of the drive—a subject who recognizes the constitutive unattainability of its lost object—out of the subject of desire, and the emergence of this subject would thwart capitalist relations of production. The subject of the drive, the subject who recognizes the necessary failure of the pursuit of its object and finds satisfaction in this

failure, is not a good consumer, and the proliferation of such subjects portends the possibility a transformation of capitalist relations of production. On the one hand, the spatialization of time plays a part in subjecting individuals to the capitalist mode of production; on the other hand, it has the potential to liberate them from their position as perpetual consumers.

There is, of course, nothing necessary about the emergence of the subject of the drive. The contemporary spatialization of time may simply continue to produce dissatisfied subjects of desire who continue to increase their investment in the illusory promise embodied by the commodity. As long as we experience the object's failure as contingent rather than necessary, we will remain subjects of desire devoted to the capitalist mode of production. As long as we experience this particular Coke rather than the commodity itself as dissatisfying, we will remain devoted consumers. The key to breaking from this devotion lies in grasping the necessity of the failure, and this is what today's near-complete spatialization of time makes possible. For the subject of the drive, success must become impossible, and failure must become necessary. Even if they grasp the necessity of the failure, there is no guarantee that subjects will have this experience and not retreat into cynicism, which is a mode of keeping alive the dream of successfully attaining the lost object while fetishistically denying one's investment in this idea. Cynicism constitutes the primary ethical and political danger today because it allows subjects to acknowledge the hopelessness of consumption while simultaneously consuming with as much hope as the most naïve consumer. Cool detachment is never as detached as it pretends to be. The cynical subject recognizes the logic of the drive and clings nonetheless to the promise of desire.

The emergence of the subject of the drive from the subject of desire is the aim of the psychoanalytic process, and in this sense, psychoanalysis represents an anticonsumer practice.[47] But the instant access of the digital era allows for the expansion of this psychoanalytic dynamic well beyond the clinic. Even those who can't afford or would never enter psychoanalysis can experience the illusory status of every object of desire. The transformation from the subject of desire to the subject of the drive does not involve the birth of a new form of subjectivity but rather the uncovering of the logic that

unconsciously animates whatever form that subjectivity takes. The subject of the drive lies hidden within every subject of desire, and uncovering it is the ethical task of atemporal cinema. After a century devoted to the ethics of time in which psychoanalysis presented an atemporal ethical alternative, this new cinematic mode marks the end of the twentieth century by bringing the psychoanalytic alternative into a wider cultural circulation.

OUT OF TIME

The theorization of the cinema found in the thought of Bazin, Kracauer, and Deleuze focuses on the cinema's ability to present an authentic experience of temporality. In this sense, they each see in their own way how cinema might act as a rampart against the spatialization of time, a place where temporality remains a viable existential possibility, despite the disappearance of time outside the cinema. In the vein of this theoretical approach, many filmmakers have consecrated their cinema to temporality and the spectator's experience of it. Contemporary directors such as Wes Anderson, Claire Denis, Jim Jarmusch, and Wim Wenders have created films that prioritize the experience of time, following in the direction established by figures such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, and Satyajit Ray. But others have taken the opposite approach: rather than holding onto temporality, they have begun to embrace the spatialization of time and to explore its ramifications. Though the cinema can present an authentic experience of temporality, it can also create a world where time as we understand it no longer exists, and the latter has recently emerged as the radical edge of contemporary cinema.

The use of editing to disrupt standard narrative time is not new but has occurred since the silent era. By overlapping shots depicting the same movement in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Sergei Eisenstein challenged the idea of time as a regulated order, and by breaking down the distinction between scenes from the present and scenes from the past in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961) and other films, Alain Resnais created an experience of time that did not fit into a linear narrative. But these innovations remained isolated exceptions within the history of cinema, a history dominated

by temporal linearity. But starting in the 1990s, more and more filmmakers have taken up an atemporal narrative mode, and as they do so, they are changing the way that the cinema as such relates to time. Anomalous disruptions of traditional filmic temporality in the history of cinema have become a path-breaking movement within contemporary cinema.

Beginning with Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994), the contemporary atemporal cinema emerged and has been developing with increasingly philosophical complexity. Though Tarantino's films mark the beginning of this cinematic movement, they stand apart for their use of atemporality to create a more authentic temporality. *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* jumble the linearity of time, but they do so in order to emphasize cinema's creative power to generate the new out of the seemingly hackneyed past. By recycling the history of cinema, Tarantino produces the new, just as his narratives discover spontaneity even when they move backward in time.

Despite his presence at the forefront of the contemporary atemporal movement, Quentin Tarantino's films do not share the approach to cinematic time that animates the other films within this movement. Whereas Tarantino disrupts the linearity of filmic narrative and thereby affirms the fecundity of the past, someone like Christopher Nolan does so in order to show the poverty of the future. Through their temporal dislocations, Nolan's films *Memento* (2000) and *The Prestige* (2006), like other films in the atemporal movement, reveal that the future does not hold the solution to the problem of desire and that the destiny of the subject is one of a failed repetition rather than progress toward possible success.

In *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema*, Garrett Stewart recognizes the deformation of time that these films produce. He claims, "Time is reduced, in the plastic bases of its own thematic, to a permeable optic field—differential from the inside out rather than, as in filmic cinema, troped for the most part by way of deferral, succession, and return."[48] By creating what Stewart calls the timespace-image, contemporary atemporal films depict time as malleable rather than constant. For Stewart, they realize the twentieth century's theorization of time rather than breaking from it.

As a result, Stewart approaches but doesn't arrive at the direction in which the deformation of time in these films leads. The contemporary atemporal movement in cinema departs from the traditional logic of desire that dominates both cinema and capitalist society, and it adheres to the logic of the drive, in which satisfaction is located in the repetition of a failed encounter with the object rather than in its successful attainment.

Unlike the logic of desire, the logic of the drive does not respect the forward movement of time but remains attached to repetition. Desire moves in a linear fashion from object to object through time, seeking out the object of desire that would finally bring satisfaction. But from the perspective of the drive, time is an illusion created to hide the necessary failure in the subject's relation to its lost object. In this sense, there is a link between the logic of the drive and the nature of cinematic projection. The experience of time in the cinema has always been an experience of the reassembling of pieces of frozen time into the illusion of temporal movement. The time that one experiences within a filmic diegesis is always an illusory time, even if it might allow the spectator to gain access to an otherwise inaccessible authentic temporality. Rather than experiencing time, one experiences twenty-four still images per second. For the spectator, the uninterrupted movement of time depends on not seeing or not recognizing the blank spaces between the images. The presence of the image for spectators depends on them not seeing the absence that constitutes the image. Successful film spectatorship relies on a certain failure of perception, just as the traditional pleasure a film offers relies on a failure to recognize the illusory status of the promise of change.

Atemporal cinema works to transform the way that spectators enjoy the cinema. Traditional Hollywood cinema and even most oppositional cinemas ensconce spectators in the logic of desire. By opposing both, a group of films that adheres to the logic of the drive represents an ethical landmark in the history of cinema. The ideological function of the cinema within capitalist society has always centered on its ability to produce and sustain desiring subjects. The popularity of the cinema during times of economic hardship, such as the Great Depression and the financial crisis of 2008, attests to its

success in performing this role. By breaking from the logic of desire, the atemporal mode challenges the role that cinema plays within capitalism. It contributes to capitalism's spatialization of time, but it does so in a way that produces a subject of the drive, a subject unable to believe in the promise of the commodity and thus more capable of comporting itself as an ethical being rather than as a consumer. The proper spectator of atemporal cinema—the ethical subject of the drive—comes to enjoyment in means rather than ends. Of course, there are few spectators who accede to the logic of the drive that these films present just by the fact of watching them, but the films nonetheless inaugurate the possibility of such accession.

The contemporary atemporal mode is the product of the digital era and its complete spatialization of time. Without the Internet or virtual reality, its proliferation would be unimaginable. Though they may diminish or even disappear as the digital era becomes more firmly entrenched, the disruption marked by contemporary atemporal films will remain. If the time-image is, as Deleuze suggests, the hidden essence of the cinema, films that embrace the logic of the drive betray this essence as a result of their interaction with the demands of the thoroughly spatialized time of digital capitalism. The atemporal movement's betrayal of the essence of the cinema sets out a path on which the cinema can remain a culturally vital and politically significant medium today. Although on the one hand the encounter with current phenomena like video games has dramatically impoverished the cinema, the encounter with the digital era's complete spatialization of time has the opportunity to save it. A new ethics of the cinema is visible in the turn away from time.

The chapters that follow focus on eight distinct yet representative films of atemporal cinema. One could imagine twice as many chapters, but this would occasion sustaining the repetitive logic of the drive beyond a point at which anyone—writing or reading—could tolerate it. The decision to limit the book to eight chapters represents the one major concession to time. Atemporal films other than the eight primary ones appear at various points throughout the chapters when their structures and themes intersect with that of the film under discussion. In this sense, though each chapter addresses a specific film, a controlling idea about contemporary atemporal cinema underlies

and motivates the discussion of that film in the chapter. The chapters are thus divided by idea as much as they are by film.

In keeping with the idea of a turn away from time, the book has not been arranged chronologically but according to the idea of atemporality. Though the first chapter deals with the first film to appear (*Pulp Fiction*), subsequent chapters do not address films in the order that they were released. The chapter on *Pulp Fiction* is anomalous because the film itself, as a result of its investment in temporality, is an anomaly of the atemporal mode. It is the only chapter in chronological order because it is the only film discussed that invests itself in the promise of temporality. The arrangement of the subsequent chapters, in contrast, defies chronology. Rather than indicating progress toward a goal, the order of the chapters reveals an increasing investment in the embrace of trauma. Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber's *Butterfly Effect* (2004), discussed in chapter 2, depicts a relatively stable existence emerging through the sacrifice of the privileged object; Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002), discussed in the final chapter, makes clear the inextricable link between the happiest moments of life and the most horrific traumas. The movement from *Butterfly Effect* to *Irréversible* shows trauma becoming more and more foregrounded in the intervening chapters. Each movement forward involves a further elaboration of loss and a further exploration of the enjoyment that the drive provides. The enjoyment of the drive lies in the affirmation of loss.

Temporality after the End of Time in *Pulp Fiction*

TARANTINO IN TIME

With *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994), Quentin Tarantino began the contemporary wave of atemporal cinema. This position at the front of the trend might seem to suggest Tarantino's radicality: as the first, he offers the most decisive step that later filmmakers modify and thereby dilute. But Tarantino's innovation, though it opens up widespread acceptance of the atemporal mode, actually remains focused on temporality rather than the break from it. In this sense, Tarantino does not belong to the atemporal mode proper but instead remains within traditional cinema's privileging of the forward movement of time. He is the bridge figure from the cinematic ethics of time to the atemporal mode and its vastly different conception of ethics. Though his films defy chronological time, they do so in order to affirm the creative power of time liberated from chronology. Tarantino disrupts the spectator's relationship to time in order to reveal time's ability to topple all attempts to master it. Time, for Tarantino, is a liberating force, but we don't recognize it as such because we cling to a traditional model of linear chronology.[1] His films indict the history of cinema for its failure to recognize and fully develop the potential of cinema's unique relationship with time. The task of cinema, as he implicitly conceives it, is one of confronting us with the power of time to liberate us from all forms of mastery—those forms of mastery

that enchain through external compulsion and those that restrict our perceptual capacity.

By disrupting time, *Pulp Fiction* attempts to capture the fundamental disruptiveness of time itself.[2] In his theorization of the relationship between temporality and narrative, Paul Ricoeur grasps how a narrative can construct a more authentic temporality through distorting time rather than attempting to approximate it. According to Ricoeur, "the struggle against the linear representation of time does not necessarily have as its sole outcome the turning of narrative into 'logic,' but rather may deepen its temporality. Chronology—or chronography—does not have just one contrary, the a-chronology or laws or models. Its true contrary is temporality itself."[3] As both Ricoeur and Tarantino see it, chronology masters time rather than giving in to its disjunctive movements. The act of submitting one's self to time requires a break from chronology's orderliness and an acceptance of temporality's refusal to be mastered, and almost all of Tarantino's cinematic flourishes play a part in affirming the liberatory potential of time itself.

The widespread spatialization of time—the proliferation of instant access, the elimination of the time lag between desire and its object—that marks the digital era presents filmmakers with a theoretical choice: they can either treat this phenomenon as a new way of accessing temporality, or treat it as a way of marginalizing the problem of temporality in the cinema and turning toward another problem. As a filmmaker, Tarantino decides on the first option, and makes films invested in the liberating power of a reconceived temporality. In *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, the spatialization of time corresponds to an unleashing of time from the constraints of linear chronology, which render its creative originality inaccessible. Most of the other filmmakers of the atemporal mode use this mode to turn cinema away from the question of time and toward that of repetition. For them, the digital era's spatialization of time offers us the possibility of confronting the logic of the drive and the inexorable repetition that it instigates but cannot contain. Tarantino intervenes on the other side, a side that has many exponents outside the cinema.

The theoretical counterpart to Tarantino is the Neo-Spinozist Left, which includes thinkers such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri,

and Paolo Virno. For them, the spatialization of time and authentic temporality coincide. In today's global capitalism, they see a world in which all boundaries dissolve: national borders become porous, the divide between intellectual activity and labor disappears, the barrier between public and private space loses its force, and so on. The elimination of formerly intractable boundaries is an index of the complete spatialization of time. When this occurs, according to the Neo-Spinozist Left, capitalism unleashes a process that will ultimately spell its undoing. It becomes possible to overcome boundaries only insofar as they are considered in spatial rather than temporal terms. Thus, the spatialization of time portends the death of capitalism because capitalism requires stable borders and chokes on itself without them.[4]

The spatialization of time introduces a constant movement that allows a new and radical sense of temporality to be reborn. As Virno notes, "What we have, then, at every moment and no matter what, is a reality which is repeatedly innovated. It is therefore not possible to establish an actual distinction between a stable 'inside' and an uncertain and telluric 'outside.' The permanent mutability of the forms of life, and the training needed for confronting the unchecked uncertainty of life, lead us to a direct and continuous relation with the world as such, with the imprecise context of our existence."[5] Virno makes clear here that the breakdown of barriers produces an incessant mutability; the spatialization of time leads ironically to a more authentic temporality, and this authentic temporality is inherently revolutionary.[6] Though he may not personally share the politics of the Neo-Spinozist Left, Tarantino is the cinematic champion of this position.

As Tarantino conceives it, cinema can show us the power of time itself to generate new conditions and experiences. Dana Polan points out that "*Pulp Fiction*'s shifts in temporality complement shifts in tone that can challenge complacent viewing. The narrative of the film endlessly veers off in unexpected directions."[7] Even though the characters and story lines have a familiar tone, *Pulp Fiction* utilizes this familiarity to disrupt the spectator's expectations rather than confirming them. The breaks from linear chronology occur when the film creates an expectation in the spectator that it will subsequently

leave unfulfilled; the breaks occur just prior to an event in the story that the spectator cannot envision. The positioning of these breaks from linear chronology draws attention to the events that they anticipate and reveals the thematic link between each of the events. In this way, the film works to create a spectator open to the productivity of time and able to perceive the emergence of newness within the familiar. Tarantino conditions us to welcome and take pleasure in the disjunctions that temporality creates.

Pulp Fiction recounts a series of related stories involving characters whose lives interact, often by chance. After an opening scene before the credits depicting Honey Bunny (Tim Roth) and Pumpkin (Amanda Plummer) preparing to rob the diner where they are eating, the film focuses on Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) and Vincent (John Travolta) carrying out a hit for Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames), a crime boss. In the course of depicting what happens to Jules and Vincent, the film intersperses the struggle between Butch (Bruce Willis), a boxer ordered to throw a fight by Marsellus, and Marsellus himself, who tries to kill Butch for failing to carry out his order. Finally, it concludes by returning to the diner, where Jules interrupts Honey Bunny and Pumpkin's robbery by drawing his gun on Honey Bunny.

The narrative structure of *Pulp Fiction* is oriented around a temporal gap within that structure. The interruption that the credits occasion in the robbery scene lasts until the end of the film, when the plot returns to Honey Bunny and Pumpkin's robbery. Almost the entire plot of the film—the events as we see them—unfolds between the commencement and conclusion of the robbery, and the conclusion defies any expectation that the spectator might have when watching the opening scene. In this sense, the film's disruption of chronology proclaims the productivity of time: time's capacity for generating novelty and difference defies spectator expectations, just as the film's structure defies the expectations of chronological narrative. As Honey Bunny and Pumpkin finalize their plans for the robbery, one could envision several possibilities: the successful robbery of the diner, the arrival of the police to thwart the plan, a patron who resists and foils the plan, or even a last-minute decision to abandon the robbery. Though there are of course other possibilities, the spectator experiences the scene while considering a relatively limited number.

What eventually happens during the robbery goes beyond what even the most savvy spectator might have imagined when watching the opening. Jules and Vincent, who just happen to be eating in the diner, thwart the plan by pulling their guns on Honey Bunny and Pumpkin, but then Jules—fresh from a conversion experience—allows them to leave rather than shooting them. By separating the denouement of this scene from its beginning with the length of almost the entire film, Tarantino underlines the unanticipated nature of what happens. The break from linear chronology represents a break in expectations as well, and this is a break that the film associates with time itself. The passing of time introduces into our experience newness that constantly defies our expectations, but we most often fail to see it because we remain imprisoned within our expectations. The atemporality of *Pulp Fiction* is an attempt to immerse the spectator in the productive power of time, which—though constantly present—is difficult to recognize. It becomes a film about time through its refusal of the time of the clock.

The most significant temporal gap in the film occurs during the hit that Jules and Vincent perpetuate on a group of young men who have betrayed Marsellus Wallace. Even more than in the scene involving the robbery of the diner, the action in this scene appears as if it will follow a preordained path. Here, Jules and Vincent exhibit near-complete mastery, and the only question appears to be whether they will show some mercy. Before the scene involving the hit, Tarantino shows an extended conversation between Jules and Vincent that begins in their car and continues into the hallway of the apartment building where their targets live. The conversation moves from the status of hash in Amsterdam to the name for a McDonald's Quarter Pounder with Cheese in France to the ethics of the foot massage. This conversation works primarily to locate the film's sympathy with Jules and Vincent before the hit, an event that would otherwise place them in an unsympathetic position. It also establishes their nonchalance in the moments before they shoot the group of college-aged men. They have no bouts of nervousness and display no pangs of remorse. They are highly competent professionals, and this is just another job to them. The banality of their dialogue testifies to the extent of their

mastery and works to convince the spectator that nothing will disrupt that mastery.[8]

During the execution scene, Tarantino sustains the film's sympathy with Jules and Vincent. The film aligns the spectator with Jules and Vincent not just through the earlier scenes, but also on the level of knowledge in this scene. Whereas the three men in the scene know that a fourth man is hiding in the bathroom, Jules and Vincent don't know this—and neither does the spectator. Tarantino films most of the confrontation between the hit men and their targets in a shot/reverse shot sequence that remains within the living room of the apartment and limits the spectator's knowledge to that of Jules and Vincent. But the film offers the spectator no sense of this limitation. The shooting of Brett (Frank Whaley) that occurs just before a fade to black seems like the conclusion of this narrative thread. When the film resumes after the fade at a bar with the chronologically later story of Marsellus ordering Butch to throw a fight, we see Jules and Vincent bringing the suitcase they obtained from the group of young men. In this scene, Jules and Vincent are dressed in shorts and T-shirts rather than the business attire that they were wearing earlier. When the bartender Paul (Paul Calderon) asks them about their clothes, Jules says, "You don't even want to know," which suggests that something unusual happened after the execution but leaves it completely ambiguous. The subsequent sequence depicting Vincent's experience with Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman) provides no new information and thus leaves this ambiguity intact.

We do not see the actual aftermath of the execution until the third part of the film, entitled "The Bonnie Situation," which takes place over an hour of projection time after the point when the spectator sees the execution. In terms of the diegetic time, however, the first scene of "The Bonnie Situation" overlaps with the earlier execution scene, though it presents the execution from the perspective of a fourth man hiding in the bathroom. The scene begins with a black screen, as the voice of Jules threatens Brett just before Jules and Vincent shoot him. The film fades into the image of the frightened man in the bathroom holding a gun, and after listening to the execution, he storms out of the bathroom screaming and fires six shots at Jules and Vincent from point blank range. In the next shot, Jules and Vincent examine themselves, see that they are unhurt, and then kill the man.

Afterward, Jules proclaims, "We should be fucking dead, man." He dismisses Vincent's talk of their luck, contending that what occurred was a "divine intervention" as he examines the bullet holes in the wall behind where they were standing. A dispute over the status of what happened ensues, with Jules insisting that a miracle occurred and Vincent refusing to see it as anything more than a "chance occurrence." But what is important for the film is not the evaluation of this event—miracle or chance occurrence—but its status as completely out of the ordinary.

As the film conceives it, time constantly disrupts all efforts to regulate being, especially those of chronology, which reduces time to a series of instants that we can calculate and anticipate. Time produces experiences that shatter the expectations that we bring to it. By placing the film's most important temporal break just prior to one such shattering experience that has important effects on the narrative, Tarantino aligns the productivity of time with its irregularity. Time's irreducibility to chronology becomes in *Pulp Fiction* the source of its generative and disruptive power. Newness and difference emerge because events do not follow from each other according to an orderly chronology.

What the film's commitment to time misses—and what the films that genuinely belong to the atemporal mode reveal—is that the promise of newness always works to obscure an underlying sameness. *Pulp Fiction* goes further than almost any other film in its effort to hide repetition. It creates the appearance of repeating the history of cinema in order to conceal the fact that this is precisely what it's doing. Tarantino's open borrowings from film history highlight difference through the way that he structures them in time. But this appearance of difference is the way that repetition manifests itself, though *Pulp Fiction* as a film fails to recognize this.[9] Tarantino's break from linear chronology thus represents a lure to be resisted, a false opening that the films of the atemporal mode will counter.

TRADITIONAL MORALITY

Linear chronology represents an attempt to control and diffuse time. The order that it tries to establish out of the disruptiveness of time

makes morality possible, insofar as the idea of a continuity between past, present, and future allows for and justifies moral judgments.[10] *Pulp Fiction* flirts with traditional morality but ultimately breaks from the continuity that underwrites moral judgments. Through its depiction of the various destinies of the principal characters, the film seems to envision a moral universe in which good behavior is rewarded and evil is punished. Conversion from a life of criminality to one of righteousness after witnessing an apparent miracle—the standard image of Christian conversion—becomes the non plus ultra of the morality that the film appears to promulgate.

Despite the prevalence of chance happenings in the narrative, one can see a teleology operative in the film that serves to emphasize that actions exist within a moral structure, ensuring that the proper consequences result from these actions. But the triumph of righteousness in the film is misleading: Tarantino ensconces the spectator in a moral teleology on the level of content in *Pulp Fiction* only to reveal the contingency of the filmic universe on the level of form.[11] If righteousness does win out in the end, it is due not to the moral nature of the universe but to the determining role that contingency plays in all moral outcomes. The only morality, as the film conceives it, lies in the affirmation of contingency. *Pulp Fiction* seduces the spectator into the comfort of traditional morality and then reveals its ultimate lack of firm foundation.[12]

The stress on the determining role of contingency in *Pulp Fiction* is indissociable from its departure from linear chronology. Contingency irrupts because time introduces irregularity and discordance into our existence, but the linear chronology of typical narratives serves to mask this irregularity and thereby to conceal the disruptiveness of our temporality. Linear chronology affirms a traditional causal structure in which effects that occur later in time follow from causes that occur earlier. It is difficult to depict an event as contingent rather than necessary while obeying this chronology. By disobeying it, however, a film or other narrative art can more easily envision the link between time and contingency. Through the formal breaks from linear chronology that he constructs, Tarantino shows the primacy of contingency relative to morality. He creates a film that highlights the determining role of contingency, though he reveals contingency

only after first suggesting the moral nature of the universe that the film depicts.

The primary instance of an apparent affirmation of traditional morality concerns the intertwined fates of Jules and Vincent. When confronted with a seemingly inexplicable event, Jules and Vincent interpret this event in opposed ways. For Jules, it serves as a miracle that tells him to abandon criminality; based on his interpretation of the chance event as a miracle, Jules changes his life. Instead of killing Honey Bunny and Pumpkin when they rob him (and the rest of the people at the diner), he gives them $1,500 and allows them to leave. For Vincent, in contrast, the chance event is simply a "freak occurrence" that has no ultimate signification and leads to no existential changes. These competing interpretations of the inexplicable event appear to have extreme consequences: Jules parts from Vincent at the end of the film ready to embark on a new life, and Vincent soon ends up dead as a direct result of continuing to work as a hired killer. Through these narrative outcomes, *Pulp Fiction* offers spectators the possibility of a moral interpretation in which the turn away from criminality brings with it survival, while the criminal path leads to ignominious death in the bathroom.

But the film plays with this moral reading rather than straightforwardly advancing it. That is, *Pulp Fiction* deploys the moral reading in order to show the power of cinema and cinematic temporality to undermine the constraints of traditional morality. Even though Jules's interpretation of the inexplicable event leads to his survival, the film does not link morality to survival or immorality to punishment. Morality cannot ensure survival because it lacks the power to subdue the constant irruptions of contingency within the film's narrative. Although Jules survives and Vincent perishes, this is the result of various contingent factors—Marsellus going out for coffee while he and Vincent are waiting for Butch, the precise time Vincent choose to go to the bathroom, Butch's decision to eat some Pop-Tarts prior to leaving his apartment, and so on—rather than the result of their specific moral choices.[13]

It is also significant that the film doesn't end with Vincent's death, though it takes place at the end of the diegetic time that the film establishes. The end of the film shows Vincent walking away, which,

as critic Kevin Howley notes, represents a moment of vitality rather than mortality because it marks the rebirth of John Travolta as a star. Howley says, "Jules and Vincent exit the coffee shop triumphantly; notwithstanding the fact that Vincent was killed by a fatal shot gun blast in the previous reel. . . . Tarantino resurrects the beloved star of *Welcome Back, Kotter*, *Saturday Night Fever*, and *Grease*. Thus, by rearranging the temporal order of his story/stories, and especially with Vincent's dead man walking routine that closes the film, Tarantino treats his audience to that most time-honored of Hollywood conventions: the happy ending. Viva Vincent Vega."[14] Howley's enthusiasm for the survival of Vincent at the end of the film testifies to emphasis that the film places on the productivity of cinema and time rather than on traditional morality. Though Vincent makes the wrong moral choice and perishes, the film allows the spectator to take pleasure at the end of the film in the image of his survival, an image that trumps the knowledge of his ultimate death. The nonlinear filmic discourse concludes with a contingent survival that takes precedence over the story's moral punishment, which occurs earlier in the discourse.

This same opposition between an apparently moral universe and an ultimately contingent one is evident in the case of Butch as well. Butch's survival seems merited as a result of his moral decision to return to the basement where Zed (Peter Greene) and Maynard (Duane Whittaker) are raping Marsellus in order to save the person—Marsellus—who wanted to kill him. But this decision plays no part in his survival (which is due solely to the strength that allows him to break the restraints holding him in the basement of the Mason-Dixon Pawn Shop). Butch's decision to return and save Marsellus actually places his life in danger because it allows Marsellus to survive, and it forces Butch to rely on his lasting gratitude. Tarantino depicts a moral act, but he does not show it benefiting the character who performs it. Though Tarantino encourages the spectator to find pleasure in the death of Zed and Maynard—in one of the film's most celebrated lines, Butch proclaims, "Zed's dead, baby; Zed's dead"—nothing in the film celebrates the morality of this act.

The film establishes the idea of a moral universe and the possibility of reading it as an affirmation of traditional morality in order to show how the contingency that temporality introduces renders

any moral system impossible to sustain. *Pulp Fiction* locates the spectator's enjoyment not in the triumph of the righteous—as films like *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) do—but in the radical unpredictability of the universe it depicts. Even when morality seems to win out in Tarantino's film, it does so through the figure of a gangster or a hit man. The only morality possible involves subjecting oneself to the variegations of temporality and the absolute dominance of contingency. Though bell hooks is correct to note that "Tarantino's films . . . titillate with subversive possibility . . . but then everything kinda comes right back to normal," this is true only on the level of content.[15] The form of *Pulp Fiction* undermines the normality of the content by revealing the lack of any order within this normality. At any time, the film might break off in a new direction through the introduction of a contingent event. The film's embrace of contingency is a symptom of its investment in temporality itself.

REVIVING THE CLICHÉ

The cliché is in some sense the opposite of the contingent event. When we succumb to the cliché, we give in to the stale formulations of the past and miss the productivity of time. For Gilles Deleuze, clichés are not simply an indication of the power of entrenched patterns of thought or even of intellectual laziness. They represent a great danger for us as subjects because they narrow our perceptive ability and limit how much we can see. Rather than becoming aware of the multiple possibilities inherent in a particular situation, we register only a small band of commonplaces. According to Deleuze, "A cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés."[16] The cliché serves a clear ideological function insofar as it renders imperceptible anything that challenges the socially established norms. When I perceive the Coke that I'm about to drink as "refreshing" or "thirst-quenching," I don't recognize its status

as commodity or my own interpellation as a consumer. One cannot revolt against a power structure that one cannot even perceive as such.

Deleuze envisions a perpetual struggle between the cliché on the one hand and the image on the other. Just as the cliché leads us back to dominant apparatuses of power, the image forges an opening to newness and difference. As Deleuze sees it, this is the specific task of the cinematic image because cinema has the possibility of "tearing a real image from clichés."[17] But the cinema itself is not immune from the danger of the cliché. Films that take what Deleuze calls the movement-image as their point of departure—films that highlight privileged instants of movement—have a tendency to devolve into cliché. The movements that constitute this type of cinema become regularized and rigid. As a result, rather than opening up perception, the movement-image begins to assist in narrowing it. But when this occurs in film history, the time-image—in the films of Orson Welles and Italian Neorealism—comes to rescue cinema from cliché and to introduce a new kind of movement that time itself occasions, a movement driven by time rather than driving it. Deleuze contends that the emergence of the time-image represents the decisive moment in cinema's struggle against the power of cliché.

But cinema is never safe from the cliché: cliché is the abyss that constantly threatens to swallow cinema's creative power. Filmmakers turn back to cliché in cinema more than in any other art form because of cinema's direct dependence on an economic infrastructure. Whereas painters or novelists can create their art without foregrounding its consumption, filmmakers must constantly wrestle with the economic exigencies of film production and distribution. Of course, every art form exists within a capitalist economy, but it is only film production that renders that economy almost ubiquitous within the art form. Nothing like the Hollywood production system exists in any other art, and this situation leads almost inevitably to the cliché. Even films made outside the Hollywood system must reconcile themselves with the demand for cliché that Hollywood leaves in its wake.

Pulp Fiction is a film of clichés. From the title of the film to the costumes that the characters wear to the shot sequences, Tarantino creates a filmic world in which spectators feel at home, and they feel at home in the filmic world not because it seems realistic but

because it mimics moments throughout the history of cinema. That is, the film employs cinematic clichés and clichés derived from popular culture rather than those stemming directly from lived experience. Playing Vincent, John Travolta is dancing as he did in *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977) or *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978). Harvey Keitel as Winston Wolfe reprises the role of the cleaner that he played in *Point of No Return* (John Badham, 1993). At the restaurant Jack Rabbit Slim's, we see a Marilyn Monroe look-alike (Susan Griffiths) wearing a white dress that is blown up around her shoulders, mirroring the famous shot over the subway from *The Seven Year Itch* (Billy Wilder, 1955), which was itself cinematically quoting the shot of the dress of Dixie Belle Lee (Joyce Compton) being blown up in *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937). Characters open a mysterious glowing box, like the one containing an atomic bomb in *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955). Marsellus Wallace spots Butch running away in his car in the same way that George Lowery (Vaughn Taylor) spots his employee Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) furtively leaving town in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Through these instances and many others, Tarantino produces a sense of familiarity, even if the spectator remains unaware of the particular filmic allusion.

But the familiar becomes in *Pulp Fiction* the basis for the creation of the new. The filmic allusions create a familiarity in spectators that Tarantino subsequently undermines. Whereas dancing provides a way for Travolta to achieve success in *Saturday Night Fever* or *Grease*, in *Pulp Fiction* it represents the beginning of his demise, getting him too involved with the spouse of Marsellus Wallace. Whereas the glowing box becomes the source of an atomic explosion in *Kiss Me Deadly*, here it ends up having no visible impact on anyone in the film. When Marion's boss George sees her in *Psycho*, it portends her ultimate undoing, but Marsellus's sighting of Butch leads finally to Butch's freedom. Tarantino uses the cliché in order to establish a sense of familiarity that will become the basis for estrangement. Even clichés have difference residing within them.[18]

The familiarity of the film resides as much in its style as in its multiple references. Tarantino includes all the standard figures from film noir: Mia, the femme fatale; Marsellus, the intimidating underworld leader; Jules, the criminal trying to go straight; Butch, the

innocent caught in a criminal scheme; Esmeralda (Angela Jones), the female cab driver sympathetic to the fleeing hero; and so on. He even includes a Hitchcockian MacGuffin—the mysterious box belonging to Marsellus Wallace.[19] Like other examples of film noir, *Pulp Fiction* emphasizes atmosphere and character at the expense of plot. But the end of the film abandons the noir atmosphere that it establishes: we see Butch escaping without any fear of being followed, Jules walking away from a life of crime, the evil rednecks Maynard and Zed receiving the justice that they deserve, and even Vincent appearing alive and well (though we know he will soon die). The film uses the noir conventions in order to affirm a fundamentally antinoir point: one can escape the destitution and hopelessness of the city; one can transcend the limits that appear to be intransigent. There is actually a way out of the grim destiny that seems unavoidable because destiny is finally an ideological illusion and time constantly produces new phenomena that outstrip every predetermination.[20] The clichéd style becomes the basis for a new kind of hope.

This emergence of the new out of the cliché is also apparent in the way that Tarantino shoots the various sequences of the film. He shoots with a typically Hollywood structure: shot/reverse shot sequences during conversations, conscientious observation of the 180-degree rule, cutting on action, the use of establishing shots, and so on. But then he includes an anomalous event in the midst of these typical shot sequences. For instance, as Vincent and Jules are driving in the car and disputing the miraculous nature of the bullets missing them earlier, Vincent turns and talks to Marvin, a passenger in the back seat. Tarantino shoots the conversation with close-ups of each character who is talking, and then uses a close-up of Vincent turning around talking to Marvin. Everything at this point is formally very straightforward. Then the gunshot that kills Marvin occurs without any warning, and at the instant of the gunshot, a jump cut occurs from the close-up of Vincent to an outside view behind the car looking at precisely the same angle. This cut appears almost imperceptible because it concurs with the firing of the gun and doesn't involve a change of angle, but it represents Tarantino's method of injecting

a formal variation into the film that mirrors the occurrence of the shocking event in the film's content.

The clichéd formal style that Tarantino develops in *Pulp Fiction* becomes itself the source of difference. Tarantino's effort in the film is to show the powerlessness of cliché in the face of the productive movement of time as unleashed by the cinema. Clichés do not remain mere clichés in a Tarantino film, which is why they function as a source of pleasure. A film of genuine clichés that never transcend themselves through time would be agonizing to watch, but such a film would also, according to the conceit shared by *Pulp Fiction* and Gilles Deleuze, violate the nature of time, which is constantly producing novelty and difference. Film can rely on clichés because it has the power to uproot them, but it makes use of this power only when it attunes itself to the disruptiveness of time. The temporal disjointedness of *Pulp Fiction* is not just Tarantino's narrative flourish but holds the key to the revolution that the film aims to herald.

Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There* (2007) is part of this same attempt at revolution. Like Tarantino, Haynes uses a well-known form, the biopic, in order to reveal how time can forge newness out of the most hackneyed clichés. Through its connection with the life of its subject, the biopic has an almost intrinsic link to chronology. The key events in the subject's life most often stand as markers for the regular passing of time. But *I'm Not There* works to shatter the form of the biopic from within by recounting the life of Bob Dylan by focusing on moments of disruption. The temporality in *I'm Not There* is even more disjunctive than it is in *Pulp Fiction*. Haynes depicts the stages of Dylan's life with six different actors playing different versions of the singer at each stage, but he does not keep the stages distinct. In the midst of Richard Gere playing Billy the Kid (representing one stage of Dylan's life), Haynes cuts to a scene of Cate Blachett playing Jude Quinn (representing another) and then back to a scene depicting Gere. As the film presents it, Dylan's identity never stabilizes because time never stops and its movements always remain irregular. Seen from the perspective of films such as *Pulp Fiction* and *I'm Not There*, the most entrenched clichés—like identity itself—dissipate in disruptiveness of time.[21]

QUOTATION

Quotation is an even more direct form of repetition than cliché and seems to go even further in diminishing the disruptiveness of time. Whereas a cliché typically repeats with minor variation, a quotation repeats exactly, rendering it even more unoriginal than a cliché. Yet quotation doesn't suffer from the same bad reputation that cliché does. There are even philosophers, such as Walter Benjamin, who dream of writing books devoted solely to quoting other works. Whereas cliché seems to have lost touch with the creative power of the original expression and to represent a complete diminution of that power, quotation has the ability—or so its many champions think—to unlock the original's creativity.

But what both quotation and cliché share is a fundamental connection to authority. The cliché implicitly draws its power from the anonymous authority of ideology: when one mouths clichés, one repeats the words and ideas that ideology has provided rather than articulating something original. Even the phrase "mouthing a cliché" indicates the cliché's deferential and derivative status. It is not even speech, but simply an oral movement. But a quotation is even more directly indebted to authority. One always quotes an established authority of some sort and looks to the authority to authorize what one is saying. The power of quotations stems as much from who says them as from what they say, and the use of them indicates a yearning for authorization from a master.

But *Pulp Fiction* works to break the link between quotation and authority. Tarantino shows that rather than simply appealing to authority and augmenting a speaker's mastery, a quotation has the ability to challenge authority as such through its deployment. Just as Tarantino uses cinematic clichés in order to redeem the cliché and profess the creative power of cinema, he uses quotation to illustrate the birth of newness from within repetition.[22] Two of the key scenes in *Pulp Fiction* involve Jules quoting his favorite passage from the Bible, and each time he does so, he uses it to communicate the authority of his position. But this authority arrives only through a distortion of the sense of the quoted passage. What's more, when Jules quotes this passage, he severely misquotes it. The misquotation

doesn't necessarily undermine Jules's authority, but it does call into question the relationship between quotation and authority.

When Jules prepares to kill Brett for betraying Marsellus Wallace, his recourse to quotation works to intimidate Brett even as Brett is on the brink of death. This intimidation serves no purpose for Jules: he doesn't require any additional information from Brett, nor is he fearful that Brett will harm him in some way. It represents an excessive demonstration of authority that has nothing to do with Jules successfully performing his task and everything to do with the obscene enjoyment that he feels in the act of performing it. He tells Brett that he has memorized a passage from the Bible, Ezekiel 25:17, and then he quotes it to him:

> The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he, who in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who would attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee.

After Jules says this, he kills Brett. Jules uses a passage that concerns the punishment of the vengeful as an analogy for a gangland hit, which shows how quotation can serve widely divergent purposes and easily violate the original signification of the quoted passage. But even more importantly, Jules misquotes the passage in a dramatic fashion.

The passage in the King James Version comes the closest to what Jules says. There, Ezekiel 25:17 says, "And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them." Although Jules more or less has the verse correct in the last sentence of what he says, he simply invents the first two sentences, which have no precedence in this or the prior verses of Ezekiel. The film gives no indication that Jules has not quoted the passage correctly, though the fact that Jules later repeats precisely the same quotation suggests its thematic importance. Like the act of employing the quotation for purposes that

violate the original intent of the passage, misquotation has the ability to disrupt the authority inherent in the act of quoting. By misquoting, I can articulate an original idea in the guise of a repeating received wisdom. The misquotation allows something new to emerge through the act of repetition.

When he repeats the passage from Ezekiel at the diner, Jules does not execute Honey Bunny and Pumpkin but spares them. The quotation occasions a moment of openness where Jules is able to find a new possibility for his life. As he tells them after he finishes the quotation,

> I been saying that shit for years. And if you ever heard it, it meant your ass. I never really questioned what it meant. I thought it was just a cold-blooded thing to say to a motherfucker before you popped a cap in his ass. But I saw some shit this morning made me think twice. Now I'm thinking: it could mean you're the evil man, and I'm the righteous man. And Mr. 9mm here, he's the shepherd protecting my righteous ass in the valley of darkness. Or it could be you're the righteous man and I'm the shepherd, and it's the world that's evil and selfish. I'd like that. But that shit ain't the truth. The truth is you're the weak. And I'm the tyranny of evil men. But I'm trying, Ringo, I'm trying real hard to be a shepherd.

By rethinking the quotation as he says it, Jules is able to see his life in a new way that wipes away his entrenched self-understanding. He envisions the possibility for a radical change through the act of reinterpreting what he says.

Though Jules quotes the Bible in order to cement his position of mastery—"I thought it was just a cold-blooded thing to say to a motherfucker before you popped a cap in his ass"—the quotation ends up leading him to lose his mastery and to change his life. After experience the apparent miracle of bullets missing him at point blank range, Jules begins to rethink the role of the quotation in his life. At this point, it ceases to contribute to his authority and begins to challenge the most firmly entrenched aspects of his self-image. Rather than identifying himself with a righteous authority, Jules sees "the tyranny

of evil men" within himself. This revolution in self-conception might have occurred without the quotation or at another moment in the film, but Tarantino links it with this quotation in order to emphasize how newness can emerge out of repetition. In Tarantino's hands, quotation becomes a mode of discovering newness rather than reciting established truths. But the discovery of newness in language goes beyond just quotation: it can be found in all of the dialogue that he writes.

RESIGNIFY YOURSELF

Critics and fans celebrate Tarantino as much for his dialogue as for any other aspect of his filmmaking. Tarantino's characters are constantly talking about quotidian subjects, but the way that they talk has the effect of stripping the banality out of the quotidian. Oftentimes, the juxtaposition of the subject of the conversation and the place where the conversation is taking place sparks an original experience. This is the case when Jules and Vincent discuss the ethics of the foot massage en route to an execution or when Captain Koons (Christopher Walken) solemnly tells the young Butch about storing a watch in his anus for two years.[23] Other times, characters give a philosophical dimension to an everyday occurrence, such as when Mia reflects on uncomfortable silences with Vincent or when Honey Bunny and Pumpkin theorize about robbery in the film's opening scene. As Fiona Villella points out, "all this constant talking centres upon characters reflecting, intellectualising and philosophising everyday matters, in everyday spaces. Characters engage in serious debates over the meaning of a foot massage or when the moment of delivery of a joke has expired. Everyday talk is stylised, enhanced and layered, and so rendered dramatic, rich and poetic."[24] By elevating everyday talk and giving it an importance that it doesn't appear to merit, Tarantino reveals the creative power of the everyday that ordinarily goes unnoticed. This creative power manifests itself most clearly in the film's attempt to unleash new forms of signification surrounding socially unacceptable and offensive terms.

The resignification of offensive terms became a popular (though always controversial) political strategy in the 1990s. Resignification

attempts to change the relationship between a signifier and the enjoyment associated with it. It hopes to distill the aggressive sting of the signifier and replace it with the enjoyment that comes from the assertion of a transgressive identity. Such a transformation, as the proponents of resignification see it, marks a political victory. According to Judith Butler, the most famous champion of resignification, "The word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of its operation."[25] Resignification thus plays a crucial role in the war of position that attempts to change the cultural terrain surrounding questions of racism, sexism, and so on. The most successful instance of such resignification undoubtedly involved the term "queer." Though still to some extent in currency as an antigay slur, "queer" has become the name for the theoretical and practical exploration of nonnormative sexuality. Other attempts at resignification have been less successful.

Undoubtedly the most controversial aspect of *Pulp Fiction* is the film's use of the word "nigger."[26] As the film moves forward, Tarantino pushes the uses of the word away from the places where it is typically found it. At the beginning of the film, we hear it used liberally by black characters such as Jules and Marsellus Wallace. There is nothing unusual about this type of usage, which appears in many films depicting urban black life. Then in the middle of the film, the racist redneck Maynard uses the term on the phone to his friend Zed. Again, this is not all that atypical: one finds a similar use of the word "nigger" in a film as diverse as Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and Ridley Scott's *American Gangster* (2007). Finally, *Pulp Fiction* depicts Jimmie Dimmick, an average middle-class white guy, saying "nigger" repeatedly in reference to Marvin's dead body, which Jules and Vincent have brought to his house. Jimmie represents the culmination of the film's progressive unveiling of this term, and he is the one character that we would not expect to hear saying it.

Though many contemporary films use the word, they typically confine its use to relatively accepted situations—black characters using the term among themselves or white racist characters using the term in a way that evinces their racism. But *Pulp Fiction* goes beyond these uses of the word "nigger" by placing the term in the mouth of a white character who is not at all portrayed as a racist. In fact, Jimmie is played

by Quentin Tarantino himself, and his use of the word is not meant to generate a critique of him as a character because of the context in which it occurs. As critic Sharon Willis notes, "Everything proceeds as if, by figuring Jimmy's wife as African American, the film could insulate the director's own image from the racist edge of his discourse. Bonnie functions, then, as his alibi; she is supposed to exempt him from cultural rules, from ordinary whiteness."[27] This alibi normalizes the use of this word and allows the spectator to experience it more justified than it would otherwise be in the mouth of a white man. But as Willis points out, this compounds the film's racism rather than reducing it.

It is Jimmie's use of the word "nigger," rather than any of the various other uses, that makes the film offensive, and the film contains a tacit recognition of this fact through the lengths it goes to justify this use. Not only does Jimmie have a black wife, but he also has a black partner (Jules) with whom he feels perfectly free to say the word with abandon. It is clear from the film that Jimmie attaches no conscious malice to the term, but the way that the film qualifies his use of it reveals an implicit awareness of its offensiveness. *Pulp Fiction* relies on the racism of the word for the shock it produces, but at the same time, the film works to deny that the new deployment of the word retains any of its racist content. Tarantino treats the word "nigger" in the same way that he treats traditional morality, clichés, and quotations: he immerses himself in repetition in order to reveal how the new can emerge out of it. Though the film does not attempt to resignify the word with the explicit political intentions that would motivate someone like Judith Butler, the attempt at resignification does nonetheless derive from an implicit ethical position. According to the ethos that Tarantino develops in *Pulp Fiction* and his other films, the only path out of racism (or out of clichéd experience) lies through the staleness of its forms rather than in avoiding this staleness. When we recognize the disruptive—and thereby creative—power of temporality, we begin to speak anew with the same words.

But the problem is that this speaking anew involves a hidden repetition that goes beyond the mere repetition of an offensive word. The resignification of the word can change its meaning, its signified content, but it does not eliminate the obscene enjoyment attached to its utterance. The enjoyment is located at the point of enunciation,

in the act of the speaking subject. In *Pulp Fiction*, this enjoyment manifests itself through the way that Jimmie uses the word in reference to the recently deceased Marvin, whom Jules and Vincent bring to his house. It becomes the center of a joke when Jimmie mockingly asks Jules whether he saw a sign in front of the house that said "dead nigger storage." The enjoyment of this jest depends entirely on the offensiveness of the term and on sustaining, rather than eliminating, that offensiveness. Clearly, the image of "dead African American storage" or "dead black man storage" would not have the resonance that Jimmie's statement has—a resonance due specifically to the enjoyment that it makes evident.[28] The film's attempted resignification of the offensive term cannot escape racist enjoyment originally attached to the term. Insofar as *Pulp Fiction* continues to draw on this racist enjoyment, the attempted resignification within the film spawns racism more than combating it.

The use of the word "nigger" is not simply an aberrant aspect of the film or an isolated moment illustrating Tarantino's racism; it is rather the manifestation of the film's approach to temporality. The problem with the film's approach to temporality is at once the problem with its use of this word. Tarantino fails to see how a fundamental trauma repeats despite the disruptiveness of time or how the obscene enjoyment attached to the word remains despite the attempt to resignification, which is to say the same thing. The ethos of the film paves the way for the use of the term because it is constantly showing how the new emerges out of what is hackneyed and clichéd. By taking the word out of the situation where we typically hear it and locating it in a character who we wouldn't expect to say it, *Pulp Fiction* attempts to affirm the productivity of time itself. Within language, time produces newness by allowing for the process of resignification, and this resignification, as the film conceives it, has the power to strip away hegemonic meanings that have ossified in a word and to give birth to new forms of use that have left these meanings behind. But the film ends up recapitulating racism rather than moving beyond it, and this is a failure symptomatic of the problem that undermines Tarantino's entire approach to time.

PULP FICTION AND THE DIGITAL ERA

The emergence of the digital era makes evident the pliability of time. Through the use of digital technology, one can easily manipulate segments of time and disrupt traditional linear chronology.[29] For Tarantino in *Pulp Fiction*, this disruption offers access to a more primordial temporality that linear chronology obscures. The break from a linear chronology in *Pulp Fiction* allows spectators to experience the full disruptiveness of time. The film's approach to time is both an ontology that views time as the key to being and an ethos that privileges constant movement over stasis.

Through its celebration of the fecundity of time, the film attempts to show that we can move beyond the various traumas that seem to have an intractable hold over us. We can, for instance, overcome the racism inhering in the word "nigger" and begin to use the word in new ways to strip the word of its power to injure. Even if it is true, as some of Tarantino's critics charge, that he simply uses the word to appear cool, this would perversely justify its use. As a signifier of coolness, the term is no longer functioning as a racial slur. Likewise, with the intervention of chance, we can escape from dead-end lives or impossible situations. As the film makes clear, a shot of adrenaline to the heart or an arbitrary decision to eat some Pop-Tarts allows us to survive a brush with certain death. If we become aware of and embrace the productivity of time, trauma—though it will not disappear—will become always potentially escapable. Even death, due to the film's formal structure, loses its sense of finality: Vincent Vega continues to walk the streets of Los Angeles after Butch kills him. In this sense, *Pulp Fiction* works to create spectators filled with hope, and this fundamental hopefulness attests to the film's thoroughly ideological nature—to its attempt to obscure rather than accentuate social antagonism.

Though it adopts elements of the formal structure that Tarantino popularizes in *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, the cinematic movement toward atemporal cinema that begins with these films turns away from the emphasis on the productivity of temporality that characterizes them. Certain later films, such as Haynes's *I'm Not There*, will sustain this emphasis, but most use the break from traditional

chronology to focus on unlocking the logic of the drive. For these later films, the spatialization of time becomes a means for accessing traumatic loss rather than transcending it in the way that Tarantino attempts in *Pulp Fiction*. They disrupt linearity in order to show what time cannot ameliorate: as films such as *The Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber, 2004) and *The Constant Gardener* (Fernando Meirelles, 2005) reveal, no amount of time that passes can deliver us from the ontological and structural trauma that founds our being as subjects. Insofar as *Pulp Fiction* invests itself in the creation of the new, it attempts to escape this founding trauma, and this attempt has the effect of multiplying the trauma rather than eliminating it.

Tarantino does forge new cinematic moments in *Pulp Fiction*, but what the film misses is the link between enjoyment and trauma. Though the film so clearly wants the spectator to enjoy the cinematic and cultural clichés in which it traffics, it ultimately encourages the spectator to abandon the past and embrace the novelty of the future. But the novelty of the film is finally inseparable from its repetition, just as enjoyment is inseparable from trauma. Spectators can enjoy the film's novelty only on the condition that they recognize the repetition. Later atemporal filmmakers grasp this connection. For them, novelty serves as a lure to entice spectators to experience repetition rather than the other way around. It is only in getting beyond the effort to escape trauma—what Tarantino is unable to accomplish—that the atemporal mode of cinema can emerge.

Not the Worst of All Possible Worlds

Sacrificing the Object in *Butterfly Effect*

LEIBNIZ'S BUTTERFLY

The disruption of linear chronology in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) allows Quentin Tarantino to emphasize the contingency of the events that take place and to hint at the existence of other possible worlds in which things took a different course. The use of the atemporal mode to explore multiple possible worlds becomes explicit, however, in Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber's *Butterfly Effect* (2004). Whereas *Pulp Fiction* links alternate possibilities to the temporal nature of subjectivity, *Butterfly Effect* uses possible worlds to insist on the trauma that resists the ameliorative effects of temporality. In this sense, it marks a clear departure from the flight away from trauma implicit in *Pulp Fiction*. As *Butterfly Effect* reveals, (inherently political) attempts to correct the world can never overcome the primordial wound that founds the subject's relation to the world, and attempts to overcome it inevitably exacerbate its traumatic impact.

The narrative structure of *Butterfly Effect* jumps from key event to key event in the life of Evan Treborn (at age twenty, Ashton Kutcher; at age thirteen, John Patrick Amedori; at age seven, Logan Lerman) without ever providing a sense of what his life is like between these key events. The film shows Evan growing up and interacting with his friends from age seven to age thirteen to age twenty, but we see Evan

only when he is in the process of experiencing a trauma and can gain no sense of the normal flow of his life outside of these traumatic events. The film's disruption of typical cinematic temporality begins with this jolting formal device.[1] This structure alone, even when it moves chronologically forward as it does in the first part of the film, makes the film difficult to watch and piece together. What's more, the film doesn't at first depict the events but only the moments leading up to and following them. As a result, the spectator grasps that some trauma has occurred but has no precise understanding of what that trauma is. Evan's life seems to be nothing but a series of unrepresentable traumas: an incident that occurs while visiting his father in an institution for the criminally insane, another that takes place when his friends are dynamiting a mailbox, one that happens while a parent is videotaping the friends, and one that occurs in a woods when one member of his group threatens to burn Evan's dog alive. This narrative structure itself inaugurates trauma as the defining feature of existence and depicts trauma as a gap within the fabric of filmic signification.[2] Trauma defines us through the anomalous position that it occupies in the world of sense.

But *Butterfly Effect* soon departs from the structure that it first lays out. At college, Evan randomly learns (as he is reading his journal) of his ability to return to past traumatic events and relive them as if they were present. In the process of doing so, he finds that he can not only for the first time remember what actually happens, but also that he can change the past by acting differently than he did initially. Evan enters into past events with the consciousness and knowledge of his older self, which enables him to take control of each traumatic situation and eliminate the source of the trauma. But each such action has an unfortunate—and ultimately more traumatic—denouement. The film recounts Evan's various attempts to create a perfect world through the depiction of multiple possible worlds, and each attempt merely compounds the trauma rather than resolving it. In the end, Evan stems the multiplying trauma that he creates only by accepting the ontological necessity of an initial irresolvable trauma, an initial constitutive loss. This involves the transformation of his privileged object into a lost object—or, to put it in the terms of Jacques Lacan, the turn from das Ding to the objet petit a.[3] Through these various

enactments of Evan's efforts, *Butterfly Effect* represents a unique intervention into the exploration of possible worlds.

When novelists and philosophers turn to the idea of possible worlds, their thinking usually moves in one of two completely opposed directions. On the one hand, the panoply of possible worlds serves as an ideological justification for the actual world by demonstrating the absolute superiority of the latter. From Gottfried Leibniz's claim in his *Theodicy* that we live in the best of all possible worlds to contemporary fictions such as Ursula LeGuin's *The Lathe of Heaven* that reveal the disastrous effects of attempts to alter the fabric of our world, the idea of alternate possible worlds works to show that there is really no palatable alternative.[4] In this sense, the very invocation of possible worlds represents an implicit theodicy or justification of evil in a world created by a benevolent God (or benevolent authorities of whatever stripe).

On the other hand, however, radical artists and thinkers use the idea of possible worlds to convey to the public the impression that a reality outside of what presently dominates is possible. This movement, often animated by the mantra "another world is possible," aims at energizing an oppositional political energy by offering hope for a different way of constituting society.[5] For these exponents of different possible worlds, the alternatives do not reveal the inherent superiority of the actual world but instead underline its limitations. This is clearly the intent of Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us*, which, as the title suggests, imagines the future of the earth after the demise of humanity. By envisioning this possible world, Weisman attempts to expose humanity's planetary impact and encourage a change in humanity's attitude toward the natural world. One can, it seems, divide the thinking on possible worlds in clear political terms: those who use possible worlds to justify the actual world are the conservatives, while those who use possible worlds to critique the actual world are the leftists.[6]

What stands out about *Butterfly Effect* is its ability to bring together the conservative and leftist approach to possible worlds in order to create a new way of thinking about political intervention. One can, according to the line of thought that the film follows, improve the world through intervention (and in this sense it embraces the leftist

use of possible worlds theory), but one can do so only by abandoning the idea that one can heal the world of its infirmities (and in this sense it follows the conservative possible worlds theorists). *Butterfly Effect* rejects entirely utopian thinking that wants to organize the world around the idea of general happiness or the good. It shows that there is no way of realizing the good and that the attempt to do so inevitably leads to catastrophe. But the film's rejection of the good is not a conservative rejection. The failure of the realization of the good reveals the exact type of intervention that remains possible and that would have the effect of positively changing the structure of the world.[7]

THE IMPOSSIBLE GOOD

Utopian projects—and efforts to improve the world in general—fail not because improvements are impossible but because they attempt to attain the good society, a society wherein the ultimate enjoyment would be realized: a society of true happiness. The problem with this vision stems from its inability to grasp the nature of and structure of desire. The aspect of an object (or a form of social organization) that arouses desire does so not out of some innate desirability or goodness but from its original loss. Loss has the effect of creating desirability out of nothing.[8] The object gains its privilege at the precise moment of its loss, though this is not a privileged status that it has prior to its absence. As Richard Boothby aptly puts it, "The object is ceded not in order to preserve an already formed desire but, in the most radical sense, desire originates precisely in such ceding. The object is thrust away so that it can be desired, it is lost so that it can be found for the first time. Desire paradoxically comes into being in and through its limitation, the upsurge of desire is thus coincident with its inhibition."[9] If the loss of the object constitutes that object as privileged and thus capable of arousing desire, then attempts to improve society, like desire itself, encounter a paradoxical limitation. The more one improves society (or the more one approaches the object), the more one threatens the cohesion of the social fabric itself (or the more the object begins to recede). Distance from the social ideal is essential to the maintenance of that ideal. Proximity has the effect of inducing

catastrophe, yet it is in the nature of ideals, as it is in the nature of objects that arouse desire, to draw us toward them.

Attempts to realize the good society bring catastrophe, as *Butterfly Effect* documents, because the good is, strictly speaking, equivalent to catastrophe. This is one of the key discoveries that Freud makes as he founds the psychoanalytic project. According to Lacan's account, "the step taken by Freud at the level of the pleasure principle is to show us that there is no Sovereign Good—that the Sovereign Good, which is das Ding, which is the mother, is also the object of incest, is a forbidden good, and that there is no other good. Such is the foundation of the moral law as turned on its head by Freud."[10] The good is nothing other than perfect fusion with the privileged object, but this perfect fusion is also what every society prohibits as the moment of the ultimate catastrophe, the moment when the very structure of the social order would break down. One can disguise this paradox by placing different masks on the privileged object—by making it appear as if the Sovereign Good is not the incestuous object—but in the end the pursuit of the Sovereign Good runs up against the fundamental limitation that the paradox institutes. Both the subject and society must negotiate this limitation that refuses all negotiation. The closer a society comes to becoming a good society, the closer it comes to absolute ruin.[11]

Faced with the impossibility of the good society, most political thinkers adopt a compromise position, advocating political activity to improve society while recognizing the inherent limit to the effort. For a political philosopher such as Chantal Mouffe, societies must work against the proliferation of aggressiveness without trying to eliminate it. To do so, they must transform, as she puts it, antagonistic and potentially violent opposition into agonistic debate. She claims that "antagonistic conflicts are less likely to emerge as long as legitimate political channels for dissenting voices exist. Otherwise dissent tends to take violent forms, and this is true in both domestic and international politics."[12] As her formulation here makes clear, Mouffe envisions the ultimate social good as the elimination of aggressiveness and violence, but she accepts an inherent limitation to this project. The concept of "radical democracy" names this form of compromise with the good, this attempt to head in the direction of the good but not to

go too far in that direction. In essence, Mouffe hopes to construct an order that achieves a sustainable balance between the pursuit of the good and the unleashing of violent antagonism. But such a compromise suffers from the same problems that beset the direct pursuit of the good society itself. No matter where one tries to draw the line and sustain a proper balance, the force of antagonism will push past the line and destabilize the social order. A balanced and stable agonistic society is just as illusory as a good society.

Butterfly Effect does not move in the direction of compromise—in the direction of minimizing the traumatic rupture—but instead toward embracing it and deepening its resonance. One avoids catastrophe, paradoxically, by acknowledging the necessity of an original constitutive catastrophe, which is the sacrifice of the privileged object. Evan's many attempts to change the world for the better fail—they result in ever worse worlds, both for him and for his friends—because he refuses to acknowledge the necessity of the original loss. Once he grasps this loss as an original necessity, he is able to intervene in a way that does not lead to disaster. Through this depiction of Evan's many political failures and final political success, the film theorizes politics in a way that rejects both the utopian and the compromise positions that dominate the contemporary political landscape. According to *Butterfly Effect*, the only genuinely positive political intervention involves the recognition of the necessity of loss. It grounds itself on the affirmation of loss, on the sacrifice of the privileged object, and this allows it to fundamentally alter the shape of the social reality in a way that will not bring about catastrophe. Recognizing the necessity of loss and the inevitability of repetition paradoxically opens up the possibility of creating a different world, because although loss is necessary, what isn't necessary is how the subject relates to that repetition.

A social order founded on the necessity of an original loss would break entirely with the logic of having and accumulation. One accumulates based on the idea of overcoming loss and obtaining, in some form or other, the privileged object. No accumulation is ever enough because it never supplies this object, but the failures only serve to authorize additional efforts to accumulate more. Failure does not function as a barrier to the logic of accumulation; it is the

sine qua non of this logic. Successful accumulation would imply the end of accumulation, and accumulation must continue without end. Nonetheless, a society structured around accumulation cannot avow the necessity of the failure. The drive to accumulate requires the suppression of the subject of the drive. Recognizing the intrinsic status of loss and failure would have the effect of disrobing the drive to accumulate and undermining its ideological power.[13]

The logic of accumulation is inextricable from the conception of time as mere chronology. Just as the subject of accumulation never ceases to move forward to additional acts of accumulation in hopes of finally finding the privileged object, the subject of chronological time continues to move forward in search of the promise of the new that the next hour holds. Time becomes an infinite series of moments, each of which signifies a new possibility. This is what Heidegger diagnoses as the vulgar understanding of time. As he puts it, "time shows itself for the vulgar understanding as a succession of constantly 'objectively present' nows that pass away and arrive at the same time. Time is understood as a sequence, as the 'flux' of nows, as the 'course of time.'"[14] The discreteness of each of the nows allows it to represent an opportunity for the appearance of the absolutely new. According to the chronological conception of time, the present now marks the possibility of a complete break from the past now. While understanding time in this way, one cannot see the role that repetition plays in structuring our temporal sensibility.[15]

When one grasps the necessity of the original loss of the privileged object, the status of time undergoes a radical change. This necessary loss strips the future of its potential. The future no longer bears the hope for the acquisition of the privileged object, but instead houses the repetition of the experience of loss that constitutes and drives the subject. The future promises nothing but the repetition of failure, not success. There would thus seem to be not much to recommend such a conception of time. But recognizing failure as the only possibility transforms the status of failure: rather than longing to transcend failure and successfully obtain the privileged object, one can embrace the failed pursuit as an end in itself. One can enjoy one's failures rather than waiting for the pleasure of a constitutively impossible success. By relating to time as repetition of loss instead of as the

unfolding of new opportunities, *Butterfly Effect* leads the spectator in the direction of just such an embrace.

THE ATEMPORALITY OF TRAUMA

After a flashback from the opening scene recounting a time near the conclusion of the events the film depicts, *Butterfly Effect* follows the life of Evan Treborn chronologically. But we see only the decisive moments in Evan's life, moments in each case linked to the central traumas in his life and in the lives of his friends. There are three fundamental moments: the first happens in the basement of the pedophilic father (Eric Stoltz) of Kayleigh Miller (at age seven, Sarah Widdows; at age thirteen, Irene Gorovaia; at age twenty, Amy Smart) and Tommy Miller (at age seven, Cameron Bright; at age thirteen, Jesse James; at age twenty, William Lee Scott) who videotapes an amateur pornographic film with seven-year-olds Kayleigh and Evan; the second occurs when Evan is thirteen, when he and a group of friends—Kayleigh, Tommy, and Lenny Kagan (at age seven, Jake Kaese; at age thirteen, Kevin Schmidt; at age twenty, Elden Henson)—blow up a mailbox as a prank and end up killing a young mother with her infant; the third takes place when thirteen-year-old Tommy burns Evan's dog alive while the other friends look on.[16] By focusing solely on the periods of time having to do with trauma, the film suggests a conception of time that challenges chronology. According to the narrative logic of the film, we live in the echoes of traumatic events that define us, and these events occur outside of normal temporality. Rather than existing within time, they give time its shape and structure. The eternal present of the traumatic event is the true time, and chronology represents a retreat from this present—an attempt to get beyond it—that can never succeed.

The inability of normal temporality to contain the traumatic events results in the initial absence of the events themselves from the film's mise-en-scène. *Butterfly Effect* uses Evan's malady—his tendency to black out at certain moments and then have no memory of the blackout period—as a justification for excluding the traumatic events from the screen. We see the moments leading up to the event, and then the film cuts directly to the moments just after the traumatic

event. These events exist within the narrative structure as formative absences that determine the course of the narrative without appearing within it. The film suggests the nature of the trauma in each case—one assumes, for instance, that the explosive in the mailbox injured someone, which is why everyone appears so traumatized immediately afterward—but the actual event itself remains a lacuna within the narrative. Just before the explosion, the camera tracks toward the mailbox, and then the film cuts to the four friends struggling to run through the woods. The film cuts out the traumatic event itself, which is precisely what Evan cannot remember. Leaving the traumatic events absent from the narrative while nonetheless focusing spectator attention on them underlines their importance and emphasizes their irreducibility to chronological time. The traumatic events do not fit, which is why the film cannot show them at the same time it shows the surrounding moments.

The film does eventually reveal the traumatic events themselves as Evan returns to them and relives them with an ability to change what happens. Evan's supernatural gift, which he appears to have inherited from his criminally insane father, is the ability to read (or watch) an account of his past and thereby return to that moment in time as a conscious agent.[17] Through this obviously impossible ability, *Butterfly Effect* once again affirms the importance of repetition in the subject's relationship to time. The traumatic event first appears as a gap within Evan's memory and within the filmic narrative. For him, as for the spectator, it is not so much a specific trauma as a blank space. Subsequently, however, when Evan returns to the time of the traumatic event, the true nature of the trauma becomes evident. It is as if Evan and the spectator experience the trauma for the very first time when returning to it.

According to Freud, the subject always experiences traumatic events in a way similar to the way that Evan does. Because it is not understood and occurs outside of any symbolic framework, the initial traumatic encounter does not appear to the subject as a trauma. It is just a senseless disturbance. For instance, a child doesn't understand the first introduction of sexuality by the other as being sexual in nature and thus fails to register it the trauma of the encounter.

But after the fact, sometimes years later, a similar encounter will reactivate the earlier trauma and retroactively reveal its traumatic dimension. Freud labels this process of delayed or retroactive action *Nachträglichkeit*. The power of *Nachträglichkeit* suggests that living in the present involves simultaneously living in the past.[18] Past traumas are not past because they are not often not yet traumas, and they require a present revelation to activate them. Time involves constant returns to the past—returns just like those that Evan makes in *Butterfly Effect*—because it is structured around a series of unassimilable traumatic events.

For the typical subject, *Nachträglichkeit* or retroactivity does not imply agency in the way that it does for Evan. When Evan returns to the traumas that define his life, he has the ability to change them and to eliminate their traumatic dimension. For most subjects, in contrast, retroactivity entails enduring the trauma as a trauma for the first time, not eliminating its traumatic dimension. Nonetheless, there exists a therapeutic mindset (adopted by many psychoanalysts) that takes an approach to trauma that mirrors Evan's. The therapy session allows the fully formed adult to return to the traumas of childhood and replay them as an adult rather than as they were originally experienced. This is the kind of process that even Freud himself suggests when he says, "Psycho-analysis is an instrument to enable the ego to achieve a progressive conquest of the id."[19] By empowering the ego, psychoanalytic treatment would help to create a subject capable of actively deflecting the trauma rather than passively experiencing, which is precisely what occurs in the case of Evan.

Though *Butterfly Effect* shows Evan effectively vacating the trauma from his experiences, the end result of his intervention is in each case the creation of a greater trauma. He recognizes that he has the ability to change the past as the result of a moment of chance. A woman returns to Evan's dorm room with him after they meet at a bar, and while they prepare to have sex, she begins to read one of his journals that she found beneath his bed. Evan grabs the journal from her and begins to read himself. The film shows the words on the page in a close-up as they begin to shake. After a cut to a close-up of the woman asking Evan if he is okay, the entire scene disappears into white streaks of light against a black background, and finally a

cut returns us to a completely different scene—the moment when Tommy lit Evan's dog on fire (which the film omitted in the earlier depiction of this incident). Through an anonymous woman's haphazard intervention, Evan learns that he has the ability to return to the lost traumatic events of his life.

After grasping the promise that the journals embody, Evan quickly ushers the woman from his room and goes to visit Lenny, who is building a model plane and remains unresponsive, except for a moment when he throws Evan against a shelf and warns him against ever saying anything about the incident of the dog. Back in his dorm room, Evan reads the journal entry about placing the bomb in the mailbox. As he relives this trauma, the ability to change the past first comes to light. In the past scene, Evan unknowingly drops his cigarette on his shirt while he and his friends are watching the mailbox with the bomb in it. The cigarette burns him, and when Evan awakens from the memory, he finds a scar that had not existed prior to the act of remembering with the journal. The scar shows Evan (and us) a reconstituted present.

Two moments of chance—an anonymous woman picking up Evan's journal and Evan dropping a cigarette on his shirt—lead to the revelation that Evan has the ability to change the world by returning to the past with the aid of his journal. The film ensconces Evan's ability to rewrite the past and change the world in chance in order to underline the absence of guarantees involved with interventions into one's past. The ability to reshape the present by reengaging and rewriting the traumas of the past—the fundamental premise of psychoanalysis—depends not so much on the conscious will of the subject, but more on the moments of chance that lead the subject toward the rediscovery of the repressed traumas. The return to the past traumas requires the intervention of chance, as *Butterfly Effect* shows, because no one would consciously opt for such a return, given the upsurge of trauma that it entails. Without the woman beginning to read his journal, Evan would have kept the journal and his power to intervene in the past safely stowed away beneath his bed. Similarly, every subject who manages to reengage the traumas of her/his past owes this reengagement to a chance encounter.

REWRITING THE PAST TO MAKE THINGS WORSE

Though obviously not in the literal way that Evan does, all subjects have the ability to intervene in their past, to revisit the traumas that represent gaps in the narrative of their personal history. These interventions, as we see happen in the case of Evan, can fundamentally reshape subjects' lives by realigning the coordinates that serve as the foundations for their lives. Most of the past is genuinely past and therefore out of reach, but the traumatic past continues to animate the present directly, which means that one can have access to it. The degree to which past trauma shapes the present is at once the degree to which one can intervene and change one's relationship to it.

Once Evan realizes that he has the power to alter the past, he intervenes in order to create the best of all possible worlds for himself and his friends. His original intervention occurs after he visits Kayleigh and asks her about her past. By stirring up memories of her traumatic past, Evan's visit leads to Kayleigh's suicide. Seeing this result and reflecting on the scar from the cigarette burn, he writes in his journal (and we hear in his voiceover), "If I can make scars, do I have the power to heal them?" Evan begins his effort to reshape the world by reading his journal entry about Kayleigh's father George Miller and his attempt to make a porn film with his young daughter. As in the earlier scene, the film shows the words in the journal start to float off the page, and then the entire image turns to black before cutting to the earlier episode in George Miller's basement.

When Evan returns to the trauma of the childhood porn film (a trauma that would shape Kayleigh's life and eventually lead to her suicide), he challenges George directly in a way that completely alters the course of both his own and Kayleigh's life. The interaction shocks George:

EVAN: What time is it?

GEORGE: It's time for you to do what I tell you to do.

EVAN: Wrong answer, fuckbag. This is the very moment of your reckoning. In the next 30 seconds, you're going to open up one of two doors. The first door will forever traumatize your own flesh and blood.

GEORGE: What's happening? How are you doing this?

EVAN: It'll change your daughter from a beautiful child into an empty shell, whose only concept of trust was betrayed by her own sick pedophile father. Ultimately, it'll lead to her suicide. Nice work daddy.

GEORGE: Who are you?

EVAN: Let's just say you're being closely watched, George. Your other option is to treat Kayleigh like, say like a loving father treats his daughter. Sound OK to you, papa?

GEORGE: Yes.

. . .

EVAN: What you need to do is discipline your son Tommy because the kid is one sadistic pup.

KAYLEIGH: Don't ever touch me again.

GEORGE: I won't.

During this exchange, the film emphasizes the stunned and shamed reaction of George, as he finds the horror of his own acts revealed to him. Although this conversation does have the effect of saving Kayleigh's life and preventing the abuse at the hands of her father, it also has the effect of inadvertently transforming Evan himself into a sadistic frat boy and Tommy into a dangerous criminal who is a mortal threat to Evan. This leads to Tommy assaulting Evan, and Evan subsequently beating Tommy to death, which lands Evan in prison, where he is subject to brutal gang violence.

In this first alternate reality that Evan creates, he finds himself in a pleasing world where Kayleigh is his girlfriend, but the world changes both of them to such an extent that they cease to resemble themselves. Evan finds himself mistreating pledges to his fraternity (whereas in the earlier reality, he associated with outsiders despised by the fraternities), and Kayleigh becomes an unthinking sorority woman who reacts against the new sensitivity that Evan displays. When Evan tries to converse with his roommate Thumper (Ethan Suplee) from the previous reality, Thumper responds, "Fuck you, frat boy." But the pivotal event in this reality is Tommy's attack on Evan.

Upon his release from prison, Tommy seeks out Evan, whom he sees as responsible for his horrible life because Evan instructed Tommy's father to discipline him, which led to a series of severe beatings. Tommy begins by destroying Evan's car, and later approaches him and threatens to kill him. As they fight, Evan loses control and begins to beat Tommy's face with a baseball bat and eventually kills him. The film emphasizes the savage beating because it is the result of the change that Evan instituted when he thwarted George Miller's child pornography. Standing up to George did not just prevent the molestation of Kayleigh and encourage the beating of Tommy; it also transformed Evan into an aggressive egoist with no ethical sensibility. He ends up in prison, where he fears for his life and must use his journals to change the reality again.

In his future interventions, Evan tries to change subsequent traumatic events, but each time the result becomes worse and worse. When Evan helps Lenny stop Tommy from killing Evan's dog, the result is that Lenny is institutionalized for life after killing Tommy. When he tries to stop the dynamite from exploding in the mailbox, he ends up without arms and legs in a reality where Lenny is Kayleigh's lover, not him. His final attempt to create a perfect world results in Kayleigh's death and his institutionalization. Each time that he intervenes on behalf of the good, he produces something worse. In this sense, the film seems to validate Leibniz's claim that we live in the best of all possible worlds.

Evan operates on the basis of the idea that he can master trauma and eradicate it. When he returns to the moment of meeting his father in an institution, his father inveighs against Evan's efforts to change the past. But Evan tells his father contemptuously, "I'll send you a postcard when I've made everything perfect again." What is most telling about this statement is not simply the power for correcting the world that it implies but the implications of the final word. Evan has never lived in a perfect world. Even prior to his first intervention, though he was a successful college student, Kayleigh (his privileged object) was working a dead-end job and living in destitution, and his closest friend Lenny was living in a barely functional state, still scarred by the traumas of the mailbox and the dog. Nonetheless, Evan claims that he will make the world "perfect again," which suggests that there was once a world prior to traumatic loss.

Evan fails to recreate the perfect world because it never existed. The world comes into being through an initial traumatic—and constitutive—loss that no one can get beyond. Every account of this loss necessarily deceives by creating the illusion that something substantial existed prior to the moment of loss. For John Milton, it is life in the Garden of Eden. For Sigmund Freud, it is the order of the primal horde in which the father is able to enjoy all women without interruption. Whatever the form it takes, every thinker presupposes a world existing prior to the fall in order to tell the story of the fall and to explain the prevalence of traumatic loss, but not everyone takes up the same attitude toward this presupposition. There is a difference between those who attempt to regain paradise and those who attempt to include the recognition of its mythic status within their thought.[20] The former—like Evan in *Butterfly Effect*—hope to leave traumatic loss behind.

But the attempt to surmount trauma leads to ever increasing trauma because surmounting trauma would remove the source of all significance. Trauma produces the cut in the formlessness of mere being, and this cut provides the space in which a meaningful world can emerge. We are indebted to trauma for the meaningful world that we inhabit. Without the cut that trauma creates, there would be no contestation, no discussion, no relation, no mediation at all. Faced with the elimination or even the minimization of trauma, subjects seek it out in order to avoid the approach of the total annihilation of the meaningful world. Evan's attempts to improve the world do not run aground so much on the law of unintended consequences (as the title of the film suggests) but on the dialectic of trauma: the more successful one is in minimizing trauma in the world, the more clamorously subjects will seek it out in order to preserve their world.

In a similar way, attempts to return to traumatic events armed with a powerful ego in order to diffuse their traumatic dimension also inevitably lead to the unleashing of greater traumas, which is why ego-building therapy can never build the ego up enough to truly stand on its own.[21] The ego gains its image of strength by mastering trauma in the psyche. Without a trauma to master or cover over, it loses its reason for being and begins to dissolve. As a result, the mastery of a foundational trauma does leave the subject with a healthy

ego but actually causes the subject to seek out additional traumas in order to stabilize the ego endangered by its own success. Success in eliminating trauma inevitably leads to its proliferation. Turning away from the initial traumatic cut that founds subjectivity and society, we accrue a series of subsequent catastrophes.

THE DIRECTORS' CUT MEETS *DONNIE DARKO*

In both the theatrical release of *Butterfly Effect* and the directors' cut, Evan's final attempt to change the past marks a decisive break from his previous ones, but what Evan does and the motivation for his action differs quite a bit in the two versions. The directors' cut adds some explanatory moments throughout the film, but there are two important variations. In their nontheatrical version, the directors include a brief scene midway through the film of a visit by Evan and his mother to a palm reader, who notices with horror that Evan has no lifeline. This scene hints at the film's ending, in which Evan kills himself in his mother's womb, an act that departs significantly from the theatrical release. At first glance, Evan's action at the end of the directors' cut seems like a more dramatic rupture with the politics of the good that he pursues throughout most of the film than does his action at the end of the theatrical release.

The directors' cut concludes with Evan's decision to change the world not by perfecting it but by eliminating himself from it completely. Rather than simply commit suicide (which would leave the impact of his existence even after his death), Evan decides to destroy himself in the womb just before his birth. The film returns to the opening scene from the extended flashback just as the theatrical version does. Imprisoned in a psychiatric institution, Evan escapes from the authorities and barricades himself in his doctor's office, where he projects home movies of his mother ready to give birth to him (rather than home movies of him meeting Kayleigh, as in the theatrical version).

Using his power to enter into the past situation and transform it, Evan reenters the womb and chokes himself with the umbilical cord, ending his life before it could have begun. We hear a voiceover of the palm reader from the earlier scene saying, "You have no lifeline,

no soul. You were never meant to be." This voiceover provides the justification for Evan's act and helps to assure the spectator that, however horrific the image of a baby strangling itself might appear, it is the proper political act. The film's concluding montage supplies the supporting evidence for this view: we see images of Kayleigh, Tommy, and Lenny all living happy lives, and Evan's mother has a baby girl in her arms with a new (seemingly nonpsychotic) partner. By subtracting himself from the world, Evan is able to construct the good society that remained impossible as long as he included himself within it.

But this is precisely the flaw with the ending of the directors' cut. Killing off the film's hero through an act of prenatal suicide might appear like the most radical ending conceivable to a film like *Butterfly Effect*, but it actually represents a furtive embrace of the politics of the good that the entire film has been predicated on exposing as a fraud. Whereas each earlier attempt to create a good society fails, this one succeeds. The concluding montage gives no indication of lack: Lenny is celebrating a birthday with friends and family, Tommy is speaking as class valedictorian, Kayleigh is getting married, and Evan's mother is embracing her newborn who replaces Evan. As the film represents it, the good becomes possible if the architect of the good society is simply excluded from that society. The architect is necessary to create the good, but must never have existed for the good to come about. There is thus an essential contradiction at the heart of the politics espoused by the directors' cut of *Butterfly Effect*, a contradiction that betrays the wholly fantasmatic nature of its ending. Fantasy allows one to experience without being involved, to see without occupying a position from which to see. In fantasy, I witness, for instance, how others act when no one is watching them. The impossibility that underlies fantasy doesn't eviscerate its power, but it does render it completely unrealizable—just like the good society.

What makes Evan's act seem like a radical political act is the way that it erases any trace of itself. Unlike garden variety gestures of self-sacrifice in which the visibility of the sacrifice adds to its appeal, no one knows or can ever know what Evan has done. He has chosen annihilation for the sake of others who cannot commemorate or even acknowledge his act. In this sense, it appears to be a symbolic

suicide—an act of giving up the societal support for his identity and thereby abandoning all social recognition. Along with numerous other disciples of Lacan, Slavoj Žižek contends that symbolic suicide represents the ultimate ethical and political act. By abandoning all support for one's identity, one becomes free to think and engage oneself without restraint, which is precisely what Antigone accomplishes when she defies Creon.[22] But what differentiates Evan from Antigone—and the makers of *Butterfly Effect* from Sophocles—is his investment in the good that he will unleash. The attempt to reconstitute the good through subtracting the architect from it in the directors' cut of *Butterfly Effect* represents a retreat from the critique authored throughout the rest of the film.

A similar retreat occurs in the conclusion of another atemporal film, Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001).[23] Like the directors' cut of *Butterfly Effect*, this film conceives of the good as realizable. Set in the 1980s, *Donnie Darko* recounts the final twenty-eight days in the life of its titular hero (Jake Gyllenhaal), who is visited by (and encouraged into criminal action) during this time by a man in a bunny rabbit costume named Frank (James Duval). At the beginning of the film, Donnie leaves his room just before a jet engine falls off a plane and crashes through his ceiling. Donnie's escape from certain death has dire consequences for the rest of the world and, it turns out, is the reason why the world is coming to an end. After depicting Donnie's survival, the film moves back in time to twenty-eight days before the incident, and it shows Donnie struggling to make sense of Frank's prophecy of doom and to prevent the end of the world.

Donnie Darko takes place during the 1988 presidential campaign, and the film displays an awareness of the politics of the time. Unlike the other members of his family, Donnie is critical of the conservative nature of American politics and the community in which he lives. His actions in the film, like burning down the house of motivational speaker Jim Cunningham (Patrick Swayze), who is a secret consumer of child pornography, aim at exposing the hypocrisy of the world he inhabits. Donnie is isolated and ridiculed in his rebellion until he meets and begins to love Gretchen (Jena Malone). She allows him to feel as if he might be able to

find a solution to his incessant dissatisfaction. But the conclusion of the film shows that Donnie's opportune departure from his room when the jet engine falls ends up dooming both Gretchen and Frank. Outside a party, Gretchen is run over by a car and killed during Donnie's struggle with two guys from his school, and subsequently Donnie shoots Frank, the driver of the car, in the eye. These events occurred because Donnie lived rather than dying when the plane engine crashed into his bedroom.

In the process of figuring out the mystery of Frank's prophecy about the world's end, Donnie learns that he must sacrifice himself to save the world. Through a wormhole, he returns in time to the night of the incident and remains in his room, accepting death in order to restore the world's harmony. After Donnie's death, the film concludes, much like the directors' cut of *Butterfly Effect*, with images of the people saved by Donnie's action who appear happy but at the same time completely unaware of what Donnie has done for them. Like Evan, he sacrifices himself in a way that assures his sacrifice will remain unrecognized. The motivation for the sacrifice is also the same: Donnie sacrifices himself to create a balanced world that his presence in that world would upset. This conception of self-sacrifice rightly views the subject as a traumatic disturbance in the world, but it fails to grasp the inescapability of this trauma. Even the elimination of the subject necessarily retains the subject as the source of the elimination.

It falls to the theatrical release of *Butterfly Effect* to move beyond the politics of the good that entraps both the directors' cut and *Donnie Darko*.[24] It is difficult to think of a director's cut of a film that varies more widely on the level of its idea than that of *Butterfly Effect*. Even the changes in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1984), which represents the paradigmatic case of a director's cut radicalizing the theatrical version of a film, are minor in comparison with those in *Butterfly Effect*. While the director's cut of *Blade Runner* amplifies certain ideas within the theatrical version, the directors' cut of *Butterfly Effect* turns away completely from the fundamental idea shown in the theatrical version, which ends with the rejection of the privileged object and the embrace of the trauma inherent in that rejection.

THE POLITICS OF SACRIFICE

Like the directors' cut, the theatrical release of *Butterfly Effect* concludes the extended flashback by returning to the scene of Evan in a psychiatric institution, where he flees the authorities and barricades himself in his doctor's office in order to secretly project old home movies. But rather than sacrificing himself, he returns to the past to sacrifice Kayleigh. Having learned from Kayleigh that she liked him from the moment she saw him and that she decided to stay with her pedophilic father rather than leave with her loving mother due to him, Evan intervenes at the moment when he first met Kayleigh. He makes this intervention from a reality that lacks Kayleigh altogether. When Evan intervened the previous time in order to destroy the dynamite before it could be used in the mailbox, Kayleigh ended up being accidentally killed after Evan lit it prematurely and it exploded. Evan's sense of responsibility doomed him to life in a mental institution, and in this reality, he lacks even the journals to use to change the past, so he has to resort to the home movies that his mother has brought to him. As he watches the film while crouched under the doctor's desk, the scene shifts to his initial meeting with Kayleigh at a neighborhood picnic.

We see Kayleigh approach Evan with the idea of befriending him, but Evan responds by reproaching her. As he leans over to speak into her ear, Evan says, "I hate you, and if you ever come near me again, I'll kill you and your whole damn family." This threat sends Kayleigh running back to the security of her mother, whom she hides behind. As a result of Evan's behavior toward her, Kayleigh decides to leave with her mother rather than stay with her father George. This completely transforms both her life and Tommy's. After a cut to Evan sitting in a college classroom, a montage of new memories is unleashed. The film shows Kayleigh and Tommy experiencing a normal childhood with their mother, and Evan and Lenny staying friends and becoming college roommates. When Evan asks Lenny about Kayleigh, Lenny doesn't even recognize the name.

Evan averts catastrophe only by deciding not to act for the sake of his own or Kayleigh's good—or for the good of the world itself. His final intervention is utterly different in kind from his earlier ones, and it is different in kind from the final intervention of the directors'

cut. Whereas all the others are done with the hope of perfecting the world, Evan performs the final intervention just in order to ward off disaster. He comes to the realization that the good does not exist, that one cannot intervene in order bring about a good world, but this doesn't sour him entirely on the possibilities for intervention as such. An intervention that avows the inevitability of trauma has the ability to improve the world in substantive ways, though the world it produces is one shaped out of the experience of loss.

The final intervention also differs in the position that it places Evan. The earlier interventions allow Evan to see himself as a hero saving others from trauma. But when he acts cruelly toward Kayleigh, Evan must take up the position of the one who imposes trauma rather than eliminating it. He acts not in a way that supports his ego or that of others but out of a grasp of the traumatic foundation of subjectivity. Acting on the basis of this recognition allows Evan to create a better world than the world he had been living in. It is a world in which Kayleigh is alive and well, Tommy is not a lifelong criminal, Lenny is not living in a catatonic state, and Evan has his arms and legs. However, it is not a perfect world, especially for Evan himself.

In the final world that the film shows, Evan must exist without his privileged object and without the hope of ever attaining this object. It will be a life without Kayleigh, in which she serves as the lost object that causes his desire but can never realize it. At the same time, it will be a life in which, as Evan puts it to Lenny, "everything's going to be all right this time." This statement doesn't indicate that Evan's life will now pass without trauma but that because he has avowed the initial trauma of subjectivity—the sacrifice of the privileged object—the subsequent traumas that beset him will not be catastrophes that will ruin his perfect life. The catastrophe has already occurred, and the knowledge that the catastrophe has already occurred frees the subject to live without inadvertently producing additional catastrophes. This is not to say that it will be a life without catastrophes: they are an inevitable fact of existence, but the key is to find a way not to multiple them or render them unbearable. The knowledge that the fundamental catastrophe has already occurred also frees the subject to live out a different relationship to time, one in which the future ceases to be a panacea for the traumatic past.

The final sequence of the film emphasizes the noncoincidence between Evan and his privileged object Kayleigh. After an establishing shot of New York City with the title "eight years later," the film shows Evan walking through a crowd on a city sidewalk while talking on a cell phone. A reverse shot of an older Kayleigh walking toward him in an elegant white suit follows. As she walks forward, she passes Evan walking the other way and looks briefly toward him while going by. The subsequent shot depicts her in the right background of the image turning to look at him; he has stopped walking and remains in the left foreground of the image still looking forward. At the precise moment he turns to look at her, Kayleigh herself turns around and continues to walk in the other direction, so that their eyes never meet. Finally, Evan recommences his walk with a puzzled look. After another shot of Kayleigh walking away, the film concludes with the image of Evan walking again through the crowd and a fade to black.

Although one might imagine a film ending with this chance meeting in order to suggest a possible future relationship, *Butterfly Effect* depicts the meeting for the opposite reason. It reveals that Kayleigh does function as Evan's privileged object but that any union between them is impossible. As the form of the sequence shows, their relation is a nonrelation. When Kayleigh is looking at Evan, he is looking away; when Evan is looking at Kayleigh, she turns to walk away and doesn't see him. These failures to see each other properly are not merely empirical failures but constitutive ones. In the final world that Evan produces for himself, the privileged object is a constitutive absence—an absence that gives the world its consistency.[25]

According to the logic that the film promulgates, a world without the privileged object is not the best of all possible worlds, but it is not the worst of all possible worlds, which is precisely what results when we attempt to instantiate the good. Despite the experience of absence and loss that inheres in the very fabric of this world, it allows the subject to avoid the catastrophes that await any attempt to have the privileged object. In the end, *Butterfly Effect* shows that Evan can improve the world by altering it, but that the improvement depends on the acceptance of a fundamental lack that nothing can remedy. Once Evan accepts this—once he accepts that he cannot have his

privileged object—a better world does become possible. In the final world that Evan creates, the dynamite in the mailbox did not kill the mother and her child; George Miller did not sexually abuse his daughter; Lenny did not retreat into a near-vegetative state; Tommy did not become a criminal; and Kayleigh did not end up working in a dead-end job in a lonely diner. Prior to Evan's first intervention in the past, these were all realities in his world. After his ultimate intervention that compels Kayleigh (and Tommy) to leave with her mother instead of staying with her father, Evan's world becomes more inhabitable than it originally was. But this increase in livability comes with a price: Evan must give up the pursuit of happiness and grasp the traumatic nature of existence itself, embracing the loss of the privileged object rather than trying to save it.

Giving up the idea of saving the privileged object does not imply a politics of moderation. It does not imply a turn to pragmatism. Though Evan abandons the idea of perfecting the world, he doesn't give up the project of radically changing it—and he does succeed in doing so. But *Butterfly Effect* makes clear that the basis for his activity undergoes a dramatic transformation. The project of change must include within it an avowal of the constitutive loss that nothing could repair. The embrace of a constitutive loss involves a changed relationship to time. Time ceases to serve as a possible corrective for loss and becomes instead the playing out of its ramifications.

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Eternity without Sunshine

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and the Hopelessness of Love

THE FANTASY OF THE ROMANTIC UNION

The ending of *Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber, 2004) depicts a radical break in the form of desire through the turn to the embrace of loss; Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) appears to move in the opposite direction. When first examined, it seems to be one of those films ruined by a compromised ending. Despite its narrative and aesthetic inventiveness, the film concludes with the image of a romantic couple that places it squarely within the ideology—and the temporality—of Hollywood cinema. As Raymond Bellour argues, the creation of the romantic couple is *the* fundamental ideological task of Hollywood cinema. All the reversals of narrative direction (beginning at the end of the relationship, for instance) and all the disruptions of the traditional steps of development leading to this romantic union in *Eternal Sunshine* do not prohibit the formation of the union itself, which suggests that these disruptions are nothing but tactics used to give the final romantic union a sublime status.

There is precedence for this type of film in Hollywood. The more barriers that the romantic union must transcend, the more spectators can invest themselves in the triumph of its image. Bellour points out that, in the typical Hollywood

fashion, "the diegetic couple . . . apparently only separates to meet again, to strengthen its image by the test of a dramatized separation."[1] Even the departures from linear chronology in *Eternal Sunshine* play a part in the "dramatized separation" that ensures the power of the romantic union that concludes the film. No difficulty or formal disruption along the way serves to call into question the romantic union as such—and thus it continues to carry all of its ideological weight.

The romantic union has this ideological weight because it offers a fantasmatic solution to a fundamental social antagonism—that of sexual difference. The heterosexual romantic union that concludes so many films implies that antagonism can be surmounted, that a complementary relationship can be achieved. This idea provides individual subjects with hope that they will find someone to provide what they lack, but it also works to convince them that the social order is a coherent whole (and thus working out successfully). This is why, according to film theorist Hilary Neroni, cinema gravitates to the romantic union. She claims, "much more is at stake in the idea of complementarity between male and female than just an individual sense of completion. The coherence of the social order as a whole rests on this idea."[2] Throughout its history, the cinema—especially Hollywood cinema—has dedicated itself to the perpetuation of this idea more than any other task. By creating the romantic union, cinema assures us that antagonism is empirical rather than ontological and that we can always overcome it.[3]

The centrality of the concluding romantic union emerges out of the temporal nature of the cinematic medium. On the one hand, this union provides respite from cinematic temporality by arresting time in the image of completion. This image serves as a promise to the spectator that the bond that unites the couple will be immune to time and never dissolve. This is why films often end with a freeze frame of the image of the union. But on the other hand, the newness that time produces makes possible and nourishes the concluding romantic union. The couple points toward a different future, which is why the female partner is often pregnant or has just given birth. Of course, heterosexual reproduction represents an ideological recasting of time's generative power, but this power nonetheless remains present within heterosexual reproduction even as the power itself is

transformed and muted. The couple testifies to the fecundity of time as much as it represents an attempt to control that fecundity.

Atemporal films often undermine the image of the romantic union through their distortion of time. Both *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002) and *5x2* (François Ozon, 2004) present events through a reverse chronology that begins by revealing the failure of a romantic union that, at the end of each film, will appear full of promise. Each film ends with a romantic union, but because the union occurs at the beginning of the film's diegetic time, the spectator, having already seen the end result, knows that the union is doomed. By abandoning the temporality associated with the cinema, these films are able simultaneously to abandon the fantasy of the romantic union, which affirms the intrinsic link between the time of the cinema and the fantasmatic couple that it produces.

Hollywood cinema lit upon the concluding romantic union as a narrative device because it provides a tidy ideological fantasy while preserving the temporality of the cinematic art. One of the chief ways of challenging the ideological function of the cinema consists in fighting against this fantasy and creating films, like *Irréversible* and *5x2*, that subvert the image of the concluding romantic union. By doing so, one reveals that the completion and wholeness embodied in this image is impossible and that romance cannot prevail over antagonism. By privileging antagonism over wholeness, the cinema can play a role in the critique of ideology rather than its perpetuation.

Despite the distortions of temporality in *Eternal Sunshine*, it does not take this path but instead submits to the fantasmatic lure of the concluding romantic union. Throughout the film, we see the relationship between Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) and Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet) at various points of development and dissolution. The film begins after their initial breakup, when Joel and Clementine have both submitted to the Lacuna procedure, a fantastic technique that eliminates all disturbing memories associated with a particular love object.[4] As a result of the Lacuna procedure, Joel and Clementine meet without recognizing each other. The rest of the film depicts their relationship primarily through Joel's experience with the procedure, which means that we see the events not as they actually happen but as they are being eliminated from Joel's memory.

The atemporal depiction of the relationship, like the atemporal depiction of the relationship in Ozon's *5x2*, reveals the antagonism that continually undermines it. But the film concludes by returning to the time after the Lacuna procedure in order to show Joel and Clementine resuming their relationship without the memory of the past failure (though they do know about this failure even if they don't remember it, thanks to the act of a Lacuna employee who grows skeptical of the procedure). *Eternal Sunshine* concludes with the romantic union of Joel and Clementine, but it is not the traditional filmic romantic union.

Rather than depicting the romantic union as the overcoming of antagonism, the film shows it to be the result of the embrace of antagonism. The temporal distortions in the film not only represent a break from traditional cinematic temporality, but also correspond to a different vision of the concluding romantic union. Joel and Clementine's relationship does not develop in time toward an image of wholeness that would eliminate any sense of antagonism. Instead, the relationship continues to move around the central antagonism that animates it without ever separating itself from this antagonism. The film lays out a way of thinking about romance that follows from the atemporality of repetition and abandons the idea of temporal development, which informs most thinking about romance and almost every filmic depiction of it. As *Eternal Sunshine* shows, the embrace of antagonism—not the overcoming of it—becomes the essence of the romantic union.

LIVING WITH ANTAGONISM

The defining shot in *Eternal Sunshine* occurs early in the film, when Joel and Clementine lie down on the frozen Charles River at night. Though we don't know it at the time, this experience repeats an earlier experience that they have lived through and that subsequently had been wiped out of their memories. Joel is worried about going out onto the frozen river, nervous about possible cracks in the ice that might cause it to break. But he eventually walks gingerly out to Clementine after she has fallen, and, in a long shot, we see first Clementine and then Joel lie down on the ice. In the subsequent shot, Gondry shoots them from above, the camera looking down on the

couple as they regard the night sky. What stands out in this shot is not just Joel and Clementine: they are lying on the ice on the right side of the image; equally as prominent is the crack in the ice on the left side of the image. The crack forms a large X that dominates the image as much as or more than the bodies of Joel and Clementine.[5]

Despite Joel's concern about cracks in the ice, the image shows us that the couple is able to lie safely on the ice right next to such a crack. The point here is not that Joel departs from his timid character in order to take a risk for the sake of Clementine and that this risk taking enables the relationship. The presence of the crack does not represent a risk; cracks in the ice do not necessarily make a frozen river more dangerous. A crack caused by expansion indicates that the ice has solidified and thus has become safe for bearing increased weight. Ice without any cracks at all could potentially be less solidified and much less safe. The crack that we see in this scene thus testifies to strength as much as to weakness. Though it may, during thawing, become the point at which the ice does break apart, at this time the crack simply marks the freezing process itself, the process that allows Joel and Clementine to walk on the Charles River. It is an enabling crack, in the same way that the antagonism between Joel and Clementine enables their relationship.

The predominance of the crack in the image indicates the constitutive status of fissure and antagonism for Joel and Clementine's relationship. This is, as Joel says later, the most perfect moment of his life, and yet, it is enabled not by a smooth frozen layer of ice but by a layer of ice with a large crack cutting through it. Perfection is not the result of the elimination of imperfection, but the product of a change of perspective that ceases to see imperfection as imperfection. Joel and Clementine's relationship succeeds only because the antagonism that underlies it remains vital. In this sense, romantic union is not the successful overcoming of antagonism; it is the embrace of and engagement with it. A romantic union without antagonism—the promise of the traditional Hollywood denouement—would cease to be a romantic union. The point here is a Hegelian one: the antagonism that obstructs the romantic union is at once the enabling condition of that union, though we inevitably fail to see it as such.[6]

The dialogue between Joel and Clementine on the ice confirms the visual emphasis on antagonism. She asks him to tell her about the stars, but he can't give her what she demands:

CLEMENTINE: Show me which constellations you know.

JOEL: I don't . . . know any.

CLEMENTINE: Show me which ones you know.

JOEL: All right. OK. Oh, there's Occidius.

CLEMENTINE: Where?

JOEL: Right there [pointing]. See. Sort of a swoop and a cross. Occidius the Emphatic.

CLEMENTINE: You're full of shit, right?

JOEL: Nope. Occidius. Right there. Swoop and cross.

CLEMENTINE: Shut the fuck up.

This entire dialogue takes place during a single shot looking down on Clementine and Joel, but as Clementine says "Shut the fuck up," Gondry cuts to a close-up of her sleeping peacefully in Joel's car as they drive back to New York. This shot and Clementine's enjoyment of the exchange itself indicate that Joel has, in fact, responded to Clementine's demand in a way that she finds appealing.

But what Clementine finds appealing—what triggers her love for him—is precisely the imperfection of his response, its failure to answer perfectly what she asks for. Clementine demands constellations from Joel, and he is able to provide only an imaginary one. Rather than turning her off, however, this response attracts Clementine to Joel. He gives her what she wants, insofar as her desire is not identical to itself. Her desire is for an object, as Jacques Lacan puts it, "which is never there, which is always situated elsewhere, which is always something else."[7] One best responds to another's desire by not precisely answering it; antagonism is the lifeblood of desire.

The contrast between the couple looking at the stars in *Eternal Sunshine* and couples doing so in other films indicates the unusual importance that the former film places on antagonism. This type of scene is not uncommon in the cinema, and most of the time it serves to provide an image of fantasmatic wholeness. In Rob Reiner's *The Sure*

Thing (1985), for instance, Gib (John Cusack) impresses a previously unimpressed Alison (Daphne Zuniga) with his knowledge of the stars. The scene on the roof of the university library in which he identifies several constellations and tells the stories associated with them marks the beginning of the bond between them that will conclude with the fantasmatic image of the romantic union.

Watching the stars in Woody Allen's *Shadows and Fog* (1992) operates in the same way. During a walk together through the night, Kleinman (Woody Allen) and Irmy (Mia Farrow) stop to look at the sky as the fog begins to lift. Like *The Sure Thing*, this moment represents the first hint of their eventual romantic union. Irmy's description of the moment during their conversation makes this explicit. She says, "This is real, isn't it, and beautiful? Just think about it for a minute. Here we are, we're two strangers, and we're out in the night. And it's just so peaceful and quiet. And suddenly there's a little clearing in the fog and we can see right out there to the stars. Doesn't this moment just seem perfect?" In these two films (and many others), the stars provide the background against which the image of the perfect romantic union can germinate.[8]

In *Eternal Sunshine*, the stars become the site for the playing out of antagonism. Like the image of the crack running through the ice, Joel's response to Clementine indicates a fissure between the two of them—an imperfection in the relationship. This imperfection is real and will eventually drive them apart, but it is also what brings them together. By stressing the productiveness of this fissure, *Eternal Sunshine* demands a fundamental reexamination of accepted ideas about romantic love. Rather than being a way of completing the self and ridding oneself of a sense of lack, it becomes a way of highlighting one's incompleteness. Rather than conquering antagonism, it becomes a way of living through antagonism. The only possible romantic success involves the embrace of its inherent failure.

The unfolding of the relationship between Joel and Clementine adds to this sense of the constitutive power of antagonism. After the credits, the film unveils the fragments of the relationship in reverse order, as the Lacuna procedure is wiping out Joel's memory of Clementine. The film's unusual narrative structure is the result of the exigencies of its subject matter: seeing how Joel and Clementine's

relationship concludes allows us to watch its incipience without hope. Rather than believing that the romantic union between the two will allow them to find completion, we know from the beginning that antagonism will continue to haunt their union until it destroys it. We see in every early stage of the relationship a foreshadowing of the eventual breakup.

The viciousness of the breakup scene, which is the first scene of the relationship that we see, makes it impossible to see possibilities for its success. Clementine comes home drunk, having wrecked the car into a fire hydrant, after Joel had earlier occasioned a dispute between them by questioning her readiness for motherhood. Joel accuses Clementine of being a "wino," and she responds, "Face it, Joely, you're freaked out because I was out late without you, and in your little wormy brain, you're trying to figure out, did she fuck someone tonight?" Joel tells her, "No, see, Clem, I assume you fucked someone tonight. Isn't that how you get people to like you?" This final statement triggers Clementine's departure and the end of the relationship.

More than just the words, the behavior of the characters registers the fundamental disgust that each has with the other. Joel's lack of passion repulses Clementine, while he has contempt for the way that she shamelessly parades her enjoyment. Though many relationships recover from fights worse than this one, this fight does not come, for the spectator, after the development of the bond between them. Films often play up the antagonism between characters before showing how they overcome it—this trope stretches from *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940) to *Knocked Up* (Judd Apatow, 2007)—but in most cases the antagonism provokes a passion in the characters that we can easily anticipate turning into love. In *Eternal Sunshine*, the antagonism seems to suggest a fundamental incompatibility; traditional filmic romances depict antagonism as a surface that conceals a fundamental compatibility.[9]

Even when Joel and Clementine first meet and seem to connect with each other, the antagonism between them becomes readily apparent. This is Joel's first memory of Clementine—and thus the last that we see. They meet at a beach party and at night wander together to an empty house on the beach. According to the voiceover,

in the original experience Clementine decides to spend the night in the house, but Joel leaves for fear of being caught there by the proper owners (or for fear of being in a sexual situation with Clementine). In the memory that we see, Joel remains with Clementine. They kiss, but as they do, the house collapses around them and the memory disappears. Despite Joel's regrets, this first encounter with Clementine reveals the basic fissure that ends up destroying the relationship: his timidity cannot accommodate her open displays of enjoyment that flaunt convention. The narrative structure has the effect of placing this antagonism in the foreground of our experience of Joel and Clementine. Had we seen their encounter on the beach first, we would be free to imagine the relationship as the overcoming of the antagonism, and we would be able to see chemistry between them where instead we see antagonism.[10]

NOTHING BUT ANTAGONISM IN *5X2*

Though it structures time in a somewhat different way than *Eternal Sunshine*, François Ozon's *5x2* appears to adopt a similar attitude toward the role of antagonism in the romantic union. Using a reverse chronology like the one employed in *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) and *Irréversible*, Ozon begins with the divorce of Marion (Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi) and Gilles (Stéphane Freiss) and concludes with the initial moments of their romance. By beginning with the divorce and moving backward, the film demands that the spectator experience the five different segments showing the decisive moments of their relationship through the lens of its eventual dissolution. By reversing linear chronology, Ozon exposes the illusory status of the image of the concluding romantic union, an image that depends on not considering what ensues in the aftermath of this union.

The focus on the antagonism between Marion and Gilles in *5x2* is unrelenting. Even what should be the happiest moments of their relationship, such as the birth of their only child, evince the seeds of its end. But this extreme depiction of antagonism actually fails to capture the essence of how antagonism functions in a relationship. In addition to undermining the romantic union, antagonism also nourishes it, and this is the dimension of antagonism that we don't see in

5x2. The failure of *5x2* stems from its inability—in contrast to *Eternal Sunshine*—to link the romantic union to the antagonism. We don't see how antagonism arouses desire at the same time that it prevents the union that would realize desire. As a result, one watches the film without any sense of why Marion might have been attracted to Gilles, even at the moment of their first meeting, though it is not until the end of their relationship that his reprehensible activity reaches its high point.[11]

The initial segment of the film emphasizes the discord between Marion and Gilles not just through the depiction of the divorce proceedings that occur in the film's opening scene, but also through the subsequent scene in which the couple meets for a last sexual encounter in a hotel room. The absence of romance is immediately evident in this scene: Gilles prepares for sex by disrobing quickly and climbing into bed, while Marion undresses in the bathroom and then returns wearing just a towel. She appears ill at ease with Gilles, and he struggles to initiate conversation. As they are talking in bed, Marion sits up with her arms across her chest holding the sheet over herself, while she looks away from Gilles. After Gilles begins to kiss and initiate sex with her, Marion soon interrupts him and proclaims the ridiculousness of the rendezvous. But her protestations do not dissuade Gilles, who ends up raping Marion in the hotel room.

Ozon shoots most of the initial sexual act from above with a focus on the numb expression on Marion's face. Following this, Gilles has sex with her from behind, and we see Marion screaming in agony as she tries to resist his assault. As Gilles thrusts himself on top of her, the camera moves forward to a close-up on Marion and the tears forming in her eyes. Ozon shoots the scene in the hotel room in a way that makes clear the aggression that Gilles feels for Marion and the contempt that she feels for him. When he asks if they might try the relationship again at the end of the scene, Marion simply leaves the hotel room rather than responding, indicating that there is no longer any basis for a bond between them.

The fundamental discord evident at the end of the relationship echoes throughout each of the earlier segments as well. At an evening dinner with Gilles's brother and his brother's lover, Gilles publicly confesses to an infidelity, even though he can see how uncomfortable

this makes Marion. And when Marion has difficulty with the delivery of their son, Gilles has dinner by himself instead of rushing to the hospital to be with her. The night of their marriage, we see Gilles fall asleep as Marion prepares to have sex with him, which prompts her to take a nighttime walk. During the course of this walk, Marion meets a young American man, whom she kisses passionately and with whom, so the film suggests, she has sex. (After they start to kiss in the woods, the film cuts to Marion walking up the stairs to her room as a door loudly slams. The violence of the cut and the noise hints strongly at elided sexual activity.) Even the final segment, which depicts the first moments of their relationship as they meet while on vacation, hints at the problems that will eventually destroy the relationship. The film concludes with the quintessential concluding image of the romantic union: the couple walking off together into the sunset. But Gilles has to abandon the girlfriend accompanying him on vacation in order to go along with Marion, and the ease with which he abandons her foreshadows his inability to commit himself to Marion.

By depicting antagonism as a force of pure destruction, *5x2* identifies itself as an exploration of the movement of temporality rather than the atemporal repetition of the drive. Ozon reverses chronology in the film in order to show, as the title of Gaspar Noé's film puts it, that time is irreversible and that nothing escapes the ravages of time. Rather than showing the repetition of the trauma associated with antagonism, *5x2* depicts a gradually expanding discord that expands due to the passing of time. While watching the film, one sees the end foreshadowed in the beginning, but one loses sight of what remains the same no matter how much time goes by—the antagonism that unites and separates the couple. In contrast to *5x2, Eternal Sunshine* insists throughout on the productivity of antagonism. Clementine is desirable to Joel and vice versa because each subjects the other to an experience of impossibility.

DEFEATING DESIRE

The very way that Clementine is presented in *Eternal Sunshine* reveals her status as a desirable object. She is most often visible through

the Lacuna procedure, which means that she is never a fully present object on the screen, either for Joel or for us. As a result of this procedure, she is constantly on the verge of or actually disappearing. During the relationship itself, Joel could believe in Clementine's presence—that she would always be there for him—and this had the effect of eliminating his desire for her. But in the scenes of Joel's memories, her presence is always fleeting, which has the effect of reigniting and sustaining the desire for her. This first occurs during the breakup scene. When Clementine gets up to walk away from Joel, a tracking shot follows her into the bathroom of their apartment. As she walks, the shot becomes blurry, and when the camera (and Joel) arrives in the bathroom, Clementine isn't there, though it is impossible for her to be anywhere else given the development of the shot. Joel walks to the kitchen, where he finds Clementine, as if she had been magically transported there. We see her walk out the apartment door into the building hallway, but when Joel follows her, the long shot of the hallway reveals no sign of her.

Outside, Joel drives his car in pursuit of her, and then parks to chase her on foot. He walks down a block four times, each time impossibly ending up back at his car even though he had been walking away from it. And each time, we see a shot of Clementine walking away in the opposite direction, where Joel had seemingly just been. These fantastic occurrences testify to the impossibility of constituting a relationship of pure presence. Joel's desire for Clementine depends on her status as an evanescent object. When she seems to become a full presence, she becomes an object of disgust rather than an object of desire.[12]

Clementine's evanescent status even undermines what Joel sees as the best moment of his life: lying on the frozen Charles River next to her. This moment (which we see repeated in the film's opening sequence) is one of closeness between the two of them. As we see a close-up of their hands interlocking, Joel tells Clementine, "I could die right now. I'm just happy. I never felt that before. I'm just exactly where I want to be." Though this represents the greatest moment of Joel's life, we experience it as spectators only as it is disappearing. When Joel announces his total satisfaction in the final sentence, Gondry cuts from the idyllic setting of the frozen Charles River to a

New York City sidewalk, where Joel and Clementine are now lying. Just after this abrupt and incongruous cut, Clementine begins to slide away from Joel along the sidewalk and to disappear into the darkness. Here, the perfect moment vanishes at the precise moment one identifies it as such, and the object that creates the perfection resists any attempt that one makes to hold onto it. These visuals lay out a clear idea of the nature of romantic love. By depicting Clementine as constantly threatening to disappear, the film further reveals the dependence of the romantic union on the absence that would seem to undermine it.

The constitutive role that antagonism and absence play in romantic unions dooms any attempt to create a complementary relationship in which each subject completes or responds perfectly to the other. When Patrick (Elijah Wood), an employee at the Lacuna Corporation, attempts to create a relationship with Clementine based on the pieces of her (forgotten) relationship with Joel, the inevitable failure of the complementary romantic union becomes evident. Because his position at Lacuna gives him access to Clementine's erased memories, Patrick knows exactly what Clementine wants. He is able to reproduce the scenes from her past that have given her the greatest enjoyment and offer her the words—Joel's words—that best respond to her desire. He even presents her with the gifts, such as a necklace, that he knows she most cherishes.

But the more Patrick gives Clementine what she wants, the more Clementine finds him a repulsive figure. The failure of his efforts comes to a head when they travel to Boston to lie together on the frozen Charles River, attempting to repeat the earlier experience that Clementine had with Joel. The look of this scene is significantly different from both scenes depicting Joel and Clementine on the frozen Charles River. We see Patrick and Clementine lying together on the ice, but we don't see the crack in the middle of the image. Instead, they occupy the whole image, filling it with their presence. The camera is positioned in front of them rather than above, which allows their bodies to dominate the image and obscure the ice. While lying next to Clementine, Patrick repeats Joel's words exactly: "I could die right now. I'm just happy. I never felt that before. I'm just exactly where I want to be." Just as he says this, she sits up and says, "I want to go home."

Patrick's efforts fail not because he doesn't say the words in the proper way but because he *does* say them in the proper way. That is to say, he fails because the words, when he says them, lack nothing. He delivers these words in order to give Clementine just what she wants, and as a result, she cannot detect any desire, any absence, within his statement. The absence of desire—or absence of absence—in Patrick stifles Clementine's desire. This corresponds to Lacan's insistence that desire pursues what the other lacks, not what the other has. In *Seminar IX*, he points out that "what desire seeks is less the desirable in the other than the desiring, that is to say, what it lacks."[13] This lack is not apparent in Patrick; he knows that he is saying what Clementine wants to hear. Patrick uses the words as a wholly adequate response to Clementine's desire, and this intention shapes the sounds that Clementine hears. In contrast, when Joel says the same words, she hears his desire, his uncertainty about her desire and about how she'll respond to what he says.

Joel speaks to Clementine's desire as Patrick cannot not because the two are soul mates (as one might—wrongly—believe the film suggests) but because he does not speak perfectly to her desire. Clementine's desire is not identical with itself. She desires what in some sense she does not desire, what disturbs the smooth functioning of the circuit of her desire rather than what sustains it. By perfectly responding to what Clementine desires, Patrick misses that part of her desire that desires its own thwarting—the essential part of desire, desire's drive dimension. Complementarity cannot accommodate the self-defeating nature of desire. Desire returns the subject back to what disturbs it rather than allowing the subject to move on to the new.

The efforts of the Lacuna Corporation thus represent an attempt to counter the nature of desire itself. The ostensible goal of the Lacuna Corporation's memory erasure process is to allow its patients to overcome the experience of loss (by obliterating it) and to live without the past. Whereas desire draws the subject back to the traumatic past, Lacuna frees the subject to exist solely for the present. Howard Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson), the inventor of the Lacuna procedure, explains the process to Joel by describing it as a kind of rebirth, a cleaning of the slate. He says, "When you awake in the morning, you find yourself in your own bed, as if nothing had happened. A new

life awaiting you." The attractiveness of the procedure stems from its promise of the new: by submitting to it, one gains freedom from one's own past. By enabling the subject to surmount its own past, the Lacuna procedure offers the subject the ability to create identity without using its own past as the basis for that identity. This freedom from the past would be true freedom, as our past acts as a constant weight limiting the openness of the present.

The subject's past indicates its unfreedom; what it was in the past is what the subject now has no control over. The past of the subject—and how others see this past—shapes and circumscribes the possibilities for the present subject. The past is what has become, to put it in Sartrean terms, something in-itself, equivalent to a thing, and yet it remains attached to us. As Sartre claims, "the Past is a For-itself which has ceased to be a transcending presence to the In-itself. Now become an in-itself, it has fallen *into the midst of the world*. What I have to be I am as a presence to the world which I am not but which I *was*; I was it in the midst of the world, just as things are, by virtue of existing within-the-world."[14] To have a past is to lack absolute freedom because that freedom is constituted in response to an inescapable necessity.[15] By allowing the subject to evade this necessity, the Lacuna procedure seems to accomplish a great leap forward in human freedom.

By freeing us—or attempting to free us—from the past, the Lacuna procedure stands in for postmodernity itself. In the postmodern era, historical memory fades. As Fredric Jameson points out, "The postmodern must be characterized as a situation in which the survival, the residue, the holdover, the archaic, has finally been swept away without a trace. In the postmodern, then, the past itself has disappeared."[16] This disappearance of the past gives birth to a subject who appears free to create itself spontaneously, rid of the burden of tradition. If an individual past weighs on the freedom of an individual subject, the historical past, as Marx notes in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[17] The true postmodern subject, like the Lacuna patient, exists in a world where this nightmare has been erased.

But freeing the subject from its past is an act much more radical than even this Sartrean understanding of our temporality suggests.

Not just that part of ourselves that we can no longer change, the past is the site where our desire originates. Even if we transcend the subjectivity that we were (as Sartre believes that we do), we do not transcend the desire that informed this subjectivity (which is why, to sustain his conception of freedom, Sartre had to reject the psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious). Our desire remains tied to the original trauma out of which it emerges. As Richard Boothby points out in *Freud as Philosopher*, "trauma results . . . from an unresolved perceptual complex that outstrips the subject's capacity for representation and excites an unrepresentable dimension of the subject's own desire."[18] Because desire always contains this "unrepresentable dimension" for the subject, the subject remains subjected to it, unable to free itself and desire in a new direction. By wiping out the memory of this trauma, the Lacuna procedure opens up the possibility of a new desire, of a fundamental change in the subject. This constitutes its appeal.

What becomes clear as the film advances is that memory erasure does not fulfill its promises. Which is to say that it functions just like every other industry within the capitalist economy. Rather than providing consumers with an authentic satisfaction that frees them from their desire, consumer objects serve to perpetuate and augment consumer desire. If a commodity actually satisfied a desire, the desire would cease to exist, and the industry would eventually have destroyed itself. The immanent obsolescence of every commodity doesn't harm the functioning of the industries that produce the commodities, but sustains them. The same is true, despite initial appearances, of Lacuna. The point is not that the process of memory erasure wears off and the memories eventually return, requiring an updating of the process. This is, of course, how most capitalist industries function, creating the demand for the newest products through the planned obsolescence of the former ones. The failure of Lacuna's commodity, in contrast, is the result of psychic rather than economic laws; it stems from the fundamental drive animating the subject. In this sense, Lacuna's failure points to the underlying reasons for the fundamental dissatisfaction that capitalism produces. Desire, no matter how squelched by memory erasure or surfeited by consumer goods, remains unrealized.

Even after Joel and Clementine opt for the Lacuna procedure and erase their memories of each other, they nonetheless begin their relationship again just after both have had the procedure. Though it promises a clean slate for the subject, both Joel and Clementine subvert this new beginning by acting in a way that returns them to what they have forgotten. The film begins with this repetition, which shows us the failure of the Lacuna procedure even before we become acquainted with it. Repetition isn't the result of memory, but instead a gap within memory. The failure to remember a traumatic event is the key to its power over us.

Joel and Clementine's near-immediate repetition of their relationship indicates that the Lacuna memory erasure procedure does not really touch the unconscious. Neither can consciously remember the other, yet both are unconsciously drawn to something in the other. We thus see that the Lacuna procedure is exactly akin to the process of repression itself. Which is to say that it is not at all effective. Like repression, it works against its apparent goal. Although repression removes ideas from consciousness, it does not diminish the power of these ideas over our actions. In fact, repression augments the power of disturbing ideas over us insofar as it renders them unconscious, thereby allowing them to exert an influence without any resistance from consciousness. This is, according to Freud, the situation of the patient who comes for psychoanalysis. Freud finds that "the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it."[19] Like the patient with repressed memories, Joel and Clementine cannot remember anything about their relationship, yet they reproduce it through the act of repetition.

REPETITION THROUGH REPRESSION

Rather than allowing Joel and Clementine to begin again without the baggage of the past, the Lacuna procedure effectively dooms them to repeating their past, even more so because they are not conscious of it. Lacuna's failure—or its success, if we're thinking in business terms—stems from the nature of the drive itself. Memory

is the subject's effort to avoid the repetition of the drive, to consign events to the past in order to move beyond them. Memory functions as a defense mechanism against the drive: the subject remembers in order to attempt to avoid repetition. Without memory, the subject remains within the circle of repetition, like Joel and Clementine at the beginning of the film. This is precisely the situation of the contemporary consumer, which is why the Lacuna procedure has much to teach us about the dynamics of consumption within a capitalist economy.

The consumer economy demands and enforces repression in the consumer. One is structurally not allowed to remember the failure of former commodities to provide the promised satisfaction as one acquires new commodities, even if, of course, one does actually remember. Or the consumer remembers a case of dissatisfaction with a commodity but represses the dissatisfaction as such—precisely its necessary status. I remember that a particular ice cream cone didn't provide the pleasure that I anticipated, but I repress the fact that no ice cream cone has done so. Dissatisfaction with the commodity is only the fault of the individual commodity, not the commodity form itself. This repression then enables the repetition of the act of consumption: consumers buy the "new" commodity that they believe will provide the satisfaction that memory would reveal to be impossible. This is why the capitalist economy is so tied to the celebration of the new and why it opposes a genuine engagement with history: authentically remembering the past would obstruct its repetition in the continuing purchase of new commodities.

If we view the goal of repression as the effective elimination of traumatic ideas, then repression is a complete failure. But this is not really the aim of repression. Repression is a way of validating traumatic ideas and giving them power over our actions. It augments rather than lessens the power of traumatic ideas. To repress an idea is implicitly to acknowledge its importance. Like capitalism itself, the Lacuna procedure promises its patients a complete break from the past and perfect newness. But it leaves them caught up in the past without respite, without the one tool that we have to distance ourselves from its power—memory.

We shy away from remembering and cling to repetition because remembering necessarily involves an active engagement with trauma, even though the point of memory is escaping the repetition of trauma. Despite the fact that, as Howard says to Joel just before beginning the Lacuna procedure, "technically speaking, the procedure is brain damage," it is quite easy to understand its appeal. In one sense, we live this procedure every day as we subject traumatic ideas to the process of repression. Like repression, the Lacuna procedure offers us conscious respite from a traumatic idea—a respite that subjects are constantly enacting.

This is why Mary (Kirsten Dunst), the receptionist and an assistant at the Lacuna Corporation, celebrates the procedure as Howard's gift to humanity. As she points out to her lover and fellow Lacuna employee Stan (Mark Ruffalo), the procedure allows adults to return to the innocence of infancy. After Howard arrives at Joel's apartment to assist Stan with the problems in Joel's procedure, Mary quotes Alexander Pope to Howard in order to praise him and what he does. Part of the passage from Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" that she recites provides the title for the film. She says to Howard,

> How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot!
>
> The world forgetting, by the world forgot.
>
> Eternal sun-shine of the spotless mind!
>
> Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd.[20]

The passage seems to place value on the Vestal Virgin and her resistance to desire, suggesting that the poem is a celebration of the innocence of childhood (like that brought about by memory erasure). But Mary's lack of context for the lines—she proclaims that she found them in her *Bartlett's*—leads her to proffer an interpretation that is entirely wrongheaded.[21]

Though the spectator may not be familiar with "Eloisa to Abelard," the film does provide immediate clues about the reliability of Mary's interpretation: in addition to her claim that she discovered the lines in a quote book, she begins by introducing the quotation to Howard as belonging to Pope Alexander rather than Alexander Pope. Any quick

glance at the poem beyond these few lines would reveal that neither the speaker in the poem, Eloisa, nor the poet himself, identifies with the Vestal Virgin that these lines refer to. Whereas the virgin "melts in visions of eternal day," Eloisa claims,

> Far other dreams my erring soul employ,
>
> Far other raptures, of unholy joy:
>
> When at the close of each sad, sorrowing day,
>
> Fancy restores what vengeance snatch'd away,
>
> Then conscience sleeps, and leaving nature free,
>
> All my loose soul unbounded springs to thee [Abelard]."[22]

Here, despite the fact that she is in a convent, the speaker Eloisa distances herself from the virgin's proximity to heaven. Eloisa remains at the mercy of an "unholy" desire for Abelard that she never abandons, despite her brief flirtation with the appeal of the virgin's innocence.[23] For Eloisa, as for Pope, the blamelessness of the virgin's position is completely untenable; she simply cannot give up the stain of her desire, cannot forget Abelard, and return to such a position. In this way, Mary's misinterpretation of the poem and its actual meaning together provide the perfect analogue for the Lacuna procedure itself.

As in Mary's interpretation of Pope's poem, the Lacuna procedure appears to offer a break from the past and from the chains of desire. But the procedure, as we have seen, simply does not work. Like Eloisa, subjects remain attached to the traumas of the past, even when the procedure allows for their repression. The fundamental error behind the procedure lies in its utter inability to acknowledge the unconscious, despite its goal of eliminating traumatic memories. This failure becomes apparent when Joel's memory erasure goes awry. During the procedure, Joel has second thoughts and decides he wants to retain his memories of Clementine. In order to subvert the process, he moves Clementine where she doesn't "belong" in his psyche, into memories that have no explicit connection with her. Because the Lacuna procedure works from a map of the mind constructed on the basis of the patient's conscious account of the trauma to be erased, Joel takes Clementine off the map when he transfers her into memories of his childhood.

If the Lacuna procedure took the unconscious into account, it would have no trouble following that path that Joel and Clementine take in his psyche. Though Clementine tells Joel to take her somewhere she doesn't belong in order to hide her, Joel actually moves her into a memory where, on the unconscious level, she very much belongs. She appears as Joel's childhood neighbor Mrs. Hamlin, a woman who functioned as an earlier incarnation of Clementine insofar as she serves as an object of desire. The distance between Clementine and Mrs. Hamlin is only temporal, and this type of distance has no bearing on unconscious association. As Freud notes in "The Unconscious," unconscious processes "are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all."[24] It is the workings of consciousness that provide a reference to time, which is why Joel can make the unconscious connection between Clementine and Mrs. Hamlin. Unconsciously, it already exists.

After Howard manages to locate Clementine in this memory, Clementine advises Joel to locate her in a humiliating memory, believing that this would make her even more difficult to locate. Joel first hides her in the memory of his mom walking in on him masturbating, and then in the memory of several young boys goading him into killing a wounded bird with a hammer. The problem is that the association between these traumatic scenes and Clementine is again quite strong. To indicate this, Gondry cuts from the shot of Joel masturbating in his bed to a shot of Joel and Clementine lying on a bed together in the middle of a beach, and he cuts from a shot of Joel playing as if he is suffocating Clementine in front of his childhood home (after killing the bird) to a shot of him jokingly holding a pillow over her head as they lie in bed as adults. In each case, the clear unconscious association allows Howard to locate Clementine and erase her from Joel's memory, despite Joel's attempt to hide her where she doesn't appear to belong. Following the unconscious associations requires Howard's special intervention; the Lacuna procedure on its own cannot handle these sorts of deviations. Though Howard does figure out Joel's subversion of the process, the basic flaw remains: the Lacuna procedure works without any understanding of the unconscious and how it functions.

ROMANCE WITHOUT HOPE

The unconscious functions according to a logic of the signifier. Its structure involves a logic of metaphor and metonymy, in which associations take place according to substitution and contiguity. Though the Lacuna procedure doesn't recognize this logic, *Eternal Sunshine* as a film does. The film eschews a temporally ordered unfolding of events for a structure driven by unconscious associations. The logic of the film's editing is a logic of the signifier. To take just a few of the many instances, a scene at the house of Joel's friends ends with a close-up of a card from Lacuna, and the next scene begins with a shot at the Lacuna office where these same cards are being printed; one scene has Patrick referring to Clementine as "Tangerine," and the next scene depicts Clementine showing Joel her new hair color called "Tangerine." These links do not follow a chronological narrative structure, but instead suggest the film's investment in the dynamics of the unconscious.

But this investment goes beyond linking shots through metaphorical or metonymic connections. Such type of linkage is relatively common in editing, but *Eternal Sunshine* goes so far as to approximate the unconscious by allowing shots to intrude on each other. We hear voices from one scene in another; we see effects in one scene caused by actions in another unrelated one; and we see one setting meld into another one within a single scene. This blurring of traditional scenic boundaries suggests that no scene—and no memory within the unconscious—is a discrete entity. Each individual scene or memory connects with the totality. By revealing these connections through scene construction and editing, the film calls into question the basic idea of the Lacuna procedure. This procedure presumes that one can eliminate one memory strand while retaining the whole system of memory. But if every memory has a connection to the whole and to every other memory, such a process becomes unthinkable. One cannot eliminate Clementine because she is everywhere. The procedure's failure derives from an inattention to the foundational role of the unconscious in the structure of the psyche.

Though Mary's misunderstanding of the lines from Pope indicates that she shares the underlying error of the Lacuna Corporation, she eventually becomes the one who exposes the problems with

Lacuna to the world. The repeated failure of the Lacuna procedure leads Mary to return patients' memories to them toward the end of the film. Mary knows personally the results of this failure. She repeats her love affair with her boss Howard Mierzwiak after undergoing the Lacuna procedure, which represses the memory of it. When Howard's wife catches the two of them together and tells Mary that this has happened before, Mary decides to reveal the repressed memories to the Lacuna patients.

Mary returns memories to Lacuna patients in order to enable them to break from the past by reintegrating it in the way that she herself hopes to. She embraces memory, despite the pain attached to it, so as to avoid repetition. This position acknowledges the unconscious only in order to find a way for consciousness to conquer it.[25] Up to this point, in the way the film presents its case, there are two fundamental options in human existence: one can either repress trauma and subsequently continue to repeat it (like the Lacuna patient), or one can remember trauma and thereby work to avoid repeating it (like Mary after hearing the revelations of Howard's wife). But the conclusion of the film—the achievement of the romantic union by the diegetic couple—actually presents a third option, an option that Mary makes possible but that transcends her intentions.

Joel and Clementine getting back together in the film's final scene marks a romantic union without parallel in the history of cinema. Hollywood film ends so often with the romantic union—especially with the romantic union in its incipience—because it has a future of enjoyment implicit in it. Images of romantic unions thus leave the spectator with an overwhelming sense of hope and possibility. We don't see the relationship devolve into the tedium of bourgeois domesticity or into mutual suspicions or into increasing disinterest. In short, we don't see the antagonism that initially fueled the union reappear. Films tend to leave us with a sense of hope because they imply the future rather than depicting it.

The romantic union that concludes *Eternal Sunshine* takes up an entirely different relationship to the future. Joel and Clementine occupy a peculiar position at the end of the film. Hearing the tapes of their conversations with Howard Mierzwiak, both know their past feelings for the other and the reasons for the dissolution of their relationship.

But as a result of the Lacuna procedure, neither of them remembers any of this. They are living out a repetition without remembering, but now they have knowledge, which is substituting for memory. Like memory, knowledge here offers them the opportunity to attempt to break out of repetition and to free themselves from each other. But they decide instead to remain in the relationship, even while knowing that the antagonism that animates it will be insurmountable. Joel and Clementine decide to embrace repetition despite memory, a gesture that implies not trying to conquer the unconscious through an act of consciousness. Instead, they submit to the repetition driven by the unconscious.

In the concluding scene, Clementine hears Joel's taped diatribe against her, and she walks out of his apartment, convinced that their relationship cannot work out. Joel follows her into the hall and asks her to wait. The conversation that ends the film reveals their embrace of repetition:

JOEL: I can't see anything that I don't like about you.

CLEMENTINE: But you will.

JOEL: Now I can't.

CLEMENTINE: But you will, you know. You will think of things. And I'll get bored with you and feel trapped because that's what happens with me.

JOEL: OK.

CLEMENTINE: OK.

The acceptance in these lines indicates that both Joel and Clementine have acceded to the inevitability of repetition rather than continuing to long for the new. By doing so, they inaugurate a relationship that succeeds—or may succeed—through the recognition of its inherent failure.

As Clementine repeats Joel's "OK," the song "Everybody's Gotta Learn Sometime" begins on the film's audio track. We hear the lyrics, "Change your heart, look around you." Like so much in *Eternal Sunshine*, the appearance of this song at this moment is potentially misleading. A fundamental change does take place at the end of *Eternal Sunshine*, but it isn't change in the way we usually

conceive of the process. Paradoxically, Joel and Clementine change by accepting the impossibility of change. That is to say, their change involves an embrace of repetition.

Gondry uses the atemporal cinematic mode to show that Joel and Clementine embark on a relationship without any hope. Because they—and we as spectators—have seen how their future will play out, no one has any illusions about their ability to overcome the antagonism that separates them. A relationship without hope for overcoming antagonism is not simply a realistic relationship as opposed to a romantic one. Even a realistic acceptance of our inability to overcome antagonism leaves the ideal of doing so intact; the relationship that embraces antagonism demolishes the ideal as an ideal. It is a more passionate relationship than one that invests itself in the image of a future without antagonism, because although antagonism constantly threatens to destroy relationships, it is also the engine that sustains them. At the end of *Eternal Sunshine*, Joel and Clementine achieve the perfect relationship—one that grasps the necessity of its imperfection. They recognize that the trauma that accompanies the relationship is at once the source of the enjoyment they find in it.

Joel and Clementine are able to embrace repetition only after the Lacuna procedure takes the memory of it from them. *Eternal Sunshine* thus suggests that contemporary subjects existing in an ahistorial world, precisely because they have been deprived of any historical memory, have a unique possibility for embracing the trauma of historical repetition. Lacking the illusory distance from this repetition that memory provides, we are able to look at it from an impossible position—as if we were outside looking in and also caught up within it. This is the position shared by the contemporary subject and by Joel and Clementine. Like them, we have the opportunity to embrace repetition and its trauma rather than acceding to repression or to the distance of memory. This is the gesture that *Eternal Sunshine* endorses, and it is a position that requires the transformation of the cinema's relationship to time.

By concluding with a romantic union that defies the hopeful nature of the traditional romantic union, *Eternal Sunshine* challenges the very structure of cinematic spectatorship. Cinematic temporality promises us the new, and film rarely escapes the fundamental

openness inherent in its form. This openness stems from the cinema's privileging of the presence of the unlimited image at the expense of the clearly limited discursive gesture. Siegfried Kracauer notices this—he calls it "the camera's demand for limitless reality"—even in the endings of films, where one would expect closure.[26] He notes that in a film, "the main thing is that the ending does not mark the end. A classic example of such a finale is the ever-recurring concluding shot of Chaplin's old comedies; we see the Tramp waddle away and we know that he is indestructible."[27] This seemingly irrepressible hopefulness of the cinema means that the prevalence of the happy ending is neither accidental nor purely ideological. The cinema produces an experience of pure duration in which we don't know what will happen next. This, according to Gilles Deleuze, is the experience of time-image.

For Deleuze, the essence of the cinema consists in its ability to render the originality of time itself. As he puts it, "What is specific to the image, as soon as it is creative, is to make perceptible, to make visible, relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object."[28] In the cinematic time-image, we experience time itself as an unfolding duration that carries the layers of the past within it. Though time contains the past, it also presents the absolutely new. The very movements that cinema depicts—the aberrant movements that we cannot foresee—reveal this originality. D. N. Rodowick explains that in the cinema, "the direct image of time presents the inventiveness of time: the possibility of the appearance of the new and unforeseen, a possibility renewed at each moment of time."[29] Cinema confronts us with the radical openness of time itself that our experience outside the cinema most often obscures.

Deleuze's understanding of the cinema follows from Henri Bergson's conception of time. Bergson sees time not in a chronological sense but as duration in which change is constant. Time is the continual emergence of the new, the impossibility of repetition. As Bergson puts it, "Real duration is that duration which gnaws on things, and leaves on them the mark of its tooth. If everything is in time, everything changes inwardly, and the same concrete reality never recurs."[30] Cinema is faithful to pure temporality in its very structure, insofar as that structure highlights the emergence of the new. For Deleuze, if a

film rejects the time-image and thereby rejects the emergence of the new (and unexpected), it falls into cliché and thereby violates the essence of cinema.

The position that *Eternal Sunshine* elaborates suggests that a film can turn away from the emergence of the new without becoming clichéd. The film is a struggle against the inherent tendency of the filmic medium toward the production of the new and against Bergson's conception of time. For *Eternal Sunshine*, the new exists solely as an alibi for repetition, as a way of making repetition more palatable. In asking us to abandon the new, it asks us to forsake the dream of escaping the trauma of the past. This is a dream that keeps us inextricably tied to this past and tied to the sources of our unfreedom. It is only in embracing repetition that we can escape being strangled by it.

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The Path to Politics in *The Constant Gardener*

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE NOW

The reconception of cinematic romance in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004) undermines the typical fantasy that allows romance to serve an ideological function. But Gondry's film leaves romance as the concern of two individuals. The love between Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clementine (Kate Winslet) undoubtedly has political implications, but the film doesn't explore them. Instead, it focuses solely on configuring romance through antagonism rather than by attempting to surmount antagonism. This focus lies at the heart of the film's effectiveness, and at the same time creates an opening for another film to lay out the political possibilities inherent in a romance organized around not resolving but sustaining antagonism. This is the task that falls to Fernando Meirelles's *The Constant Gardener* (2005), which turns to the atemporal cinematic mode in order to enact the politicization of romance. This depiction begins with the idea that our relationship to time is itself a political act.

One of the most profound ideas in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* is the implicit link that he forges between our relationship to time and our relationship to ideology. We tend to think of ideology as a set of presuppositions that forestalls the subject's doubts and questions concerning the structure of the social order and concerning the subject's own identity within that order. But this understanding does

not go nearly far enough. As Heidegger makes clear, ideology (what he calls *das Man* or the They) extends beyond justifying a certain spatial arrangement of society and the subject; it also allows the subject to evade the strictures of temporality itself. The subject, for Heidegger, is its temporality, but ideology, with its "vulgar interpretation of time," produces a world in which time becomes a force external to the subject. As he describes it, "What is characteristic of the 'time' accessible to the vulgar understanding consists, among other things, precisely in the fact that it is a pure succession of nows, without beginning and without end, in which the ecstatic character of primordial temporality is levelled down."[1] Through ideology's transformative power, time ceases to be constitutive and irreducible—the fundamental horizon that defines our being—and becomes a series of infinite frozen moments through which we pass.

Though Heidegger doesn't explore the political implications of this ideological victory—his concern is the loss of a capacity for an authentic being-toward-death, not politics—we can nonetheless clearly make out the ramifications of his critique on the terrain of politics: ideology blurs our primordial temporality not just in order to make existence easier for us, to facilitate the flight from our own death, but also in order to render us apolitical beings.[2] Ideology has an interest in effecting a change in our relationship to temporality because the subject who grasps its authentic temporality exists with an urgency to act that the ideological subject does not. The subject for whom time is just "a pure succession of nows" never experiences the fleetingness of a situation. As Heidegger puts it, "Up to the end 'it always has more time.'"[3] As a result, the ideological or vulgar interpretation of time succeeds in producing docility. As subjects with an external relationship to time who see time as a series of nows, we can leave the field of the political to itself; its claims never truly touch us because nothing, not even the political, is exigent. But as subjects of authentic temporality, we recognize the need to intervene in our situation without delay; we become fully politicized beings.[4]

Though the film does not have at its goal reestablishing authentic temporality as Heidegger understands it, Fernando Meirelles's *The Constant Gardener* nonetheless takes Heidegger's exploration of the link between ideology and temporality as its point of departure.

The film depicts the politicization of Justin Quayle (Ralph Fiennes) through a narrative structure that breaks from an everyday or ideological conception of time. Justin, a British foreign service functionary, becomes romantically involved with Tessa (Rachel Weisz), an outspoken activist who eventually becomes the vehicle for Justin's political awakening. The events that lead to the death of Tessa—engineered, we learn later, by a pharmaceutical company—open the film, even though they occur midway through the diegetic time that the film presents. The film then returns to the origins of Justin and Tessa's relationship. Tessa accompanies Justin to Africa, where her work in humanitarian aid helps her uncover the atrocities committed by pharmaceutical companies and the British state in Africa. Her investigation into these crimes results in her murder, and inquiring into her murder leads Justin to take up her political cause, which ultimately results in his murder as well.

Politicization occurs, the film implies, through an encounter with enjoyment, an encounter that transforms the subject's relationship to time and facilitates the subject's entrance into the atemporality of the drive. Justin's romance with Tessa entails navigating her enjoyment, and the process of doing so alters his sense of time (just as it alters the narrative structure of the film itself) and transforms him into a political being. This is the transformation that the film, through its temporal structure and narrative form, attempts to effect on the spectator as well. Romance thus becomes the vehicle for political awakening rather than the path, as we see in its traditional cinematic deployment, to an apolitical retreat.

The use of romance to stifle political awareness has a long history in the cinema. From Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934) to Taylor Hackford's *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982) to Nora Ephron's *You've Got Mail* (1998), romance emerges as a way of diluting class antagonism. In each film, a romantic union that crosses class barriers reinforces the ideological proposition that class as such doesn't exist in a determinative fashion. Of course, class must be evoked in order to be denied, but such films insist on the plastic and nondeterminative nature of class status. For subjects in capitalist society, we can, according to the fiction that these and many other films propagate, rise above all class barriers.

By turning to romance, these films transform interactions fraught with political tension into idealized and wholly apolitical relationships. In *You've Got Mail*, for instance, Joe Fox (Tom Hanks) is a predatory owner of a large bookselling chain that drives the small bookshop of Kathleen Kelly (Meg Ryan) out of business. The romantic union between them that concludes the film has the effect of retroactively erasing this starkly politicized conflict. But this gesture is not unique to these films: romance—the creation of the complementary couple—is the primary ideological weapon of Hollywood cinema, and its function is almost always that of depoliticizing the spectator.

THE CHEATING HEART OF AN ACTIVIST

The radicality of *The Constant Gardener* begins (but does not end) with its reversal of the paradigmatic role of romance in the cinema. The film enacts a politicization of both Justin and the spectator through Justin's romantic concerns with Tessa. Justin begins the investigation into Tessa's death that transforms him into a politicized subject for romantic rather than political reasons. The idea that she has been having an affair with her colleague Arnold Bluhm (Hubert Koundé) disturbs and motivates Justin. The hints concerning this affair begin with the film's first scene and continue until the point at which Justin becomes a politicized subject.[5]

The film opens with dialogue between Justin and Tessa that has no accompanying visual image. We hear the first part of their conversation while seeing the film's credits begin to appear on a black screen. The initial blackness and subsequent backlit dimness of the exchange that we see between Justin and Tessa offer the film's first suggestion of the nebulous status of their relationship, at least in Justin's mind. As the scene plays out, it confirms the impression that the lighting gives. When Tessa and Arnold walk to their plane, we see Arnold take Tessa's bag for her. This gesture hints at a bond between Arnold and Tessa that might supersede the bond between Justin and Tessa. As they approach the plane, the image of Tessa and Arnold loses focus and fades to white, which further indicates the divide separating her from Justin.

The timing of the film's opening anchors its central problem in Justin's romantic feelings for Tessa rather than the political circumstances of her death. Rather than just beginning with her death, Meirelles opens the film with her departure for a trip to Loki, Kenya. This brief scene—the last time that Justin sees Tessa alive—shows Tessa getting on a plane with another man and illustrates her independence from Justin. As she departs, she tells him, "Oh, sweetheart, don't bother to see us off. It could be ages." Even if the film does not suggest at this point (as it will later) that she and Arnold are having an affair, it does point toward Justin's marginal status in her world. His investigation into her death (which leads to his politicization) begins from the sense of his own marginality and his desire to learn the truth of Tessa's desire. By initially grounding the origin of Justin's political commitment in his sexual jealousy, the film not only reverses the usual cinematic role that romance plays relative to politics, but also reveals the pathological stain at the source of all politicization. One first becomes a politicized subject not out of some neutral concern for larger political questions or some universal desire to eliminate injustice but because of singular desire that bears only on one's own subjectivity.

The film furthers the spectator's suspicions about Tessa in the first scene after her arrival in Africa with Justin (which occurs, in the nonlinear narrative structure of the film, after we see Tessa's death and Justin's identification of her body). While watching the local outdoor theater, she is visibly pregnant and interacting with Arnold rather than Justin. They walk through a village in a series of traveling shots with festive music playing in the background. Arnold expresses concern about Tessa's pregnancy and then tells her, "If you were my wife, I'd tie you to the bed." This prompts a flirtatious turn by Tessa, who asks suggestively, "And then what would you do, doctor?" as she tugs lightly on his shirt pocket. Tessa's actions in this scene and Arnold's familiarity with her begin to build a sense of their romantic involvement. But beneath this hint of romance, Meirelles offers in this scene the first suggestion of the film's political engagement. As they leave the theater, Arnold and Tessa walk over an oil-filled stream to provide drugs for a woman infected with HIV because the government clinic had none for her. In this scene, the relationship between

Arnold and Tessa overshadows the image of the oil and the neglected woman, but nonetheless the romance here serves as the vehicle through which the film politicizes us as spectators.

The next scene furthers our sense of Tessa's lack of fidelity and inaugurates Justin's jealousy. As she takes a bath, he comes to the computer and sees an e-mail that has arrived for her that says, "What were you and Arnold Bluhm doing in the Nairobi Hilton Sunday night? Does Justin know?" The film emphasizes Justin's sense of his exclusion from Tessa and her enjoyment as Meirelles cuts from a close-up of the message to a reserve shot of Justin's shocked face and then back to an extreme close-up of the line, "Does Justin know?" Later in this scene, as Justin and Tessa are discussing possible baby names, she suggests "Arnold" as a possibility, to which Justin responds, "Perhaps it will be a girl." Even though she evinces affection for him throughout the scene, Tessa does nothing to completely assuage Justin's sense that she may be having an affair with Arnold.

At this point, the film turns from the relationship between Justin and Tessa to the politics of drugs in Kenya. Justin and Tessa attend a party with British officials, Kenyan leaders, and drug company executives. While others engage in small talk, Tessa confronts Dr. Ngaba (John Sibi-Okumu) about the lack of sterilizing equipment in the clinic he opened and about HIV medication being shorted in order to purchase his limousine. The disruptive effects of these statements becomes clear as Sir Bernard Pellegrin (Bill Nighy) quickly ushers Dr. Ngaba to a tour of the garden and Sandy Woodrow (Danny Huston) tells Justin to control Tessa more effectively. Though Sir Bernard, Dr. Ngaba, and Sandy all occupy much more powerful positions than Tessa, her intervention nonetheless throws them into disarray. But even this scene concludes with a long shot of Justin looking at Arnold and Tessa standing together and a close-up of them looking knowingly at each other. By punctuating the scene with Justin's exclusion and the visible bond between Arnold and Tessa, Meirelles takes spectators out of the political drama and reinserts them into the romance.

This alternating between the political and the romantic continues throughout the first part of the film. It occurs most pointedly in the sequence that concludes with Tessa in the hospital. The

hospital scene begins with a brief low-angle tracking shot of an indistinguishable Sandy walking down a corridor carrying a fruit basket and then cuts to a close-up of an infant sucking on a woman's breast. The subsequent long shot orients us in the scene, as we see Tessa lying in a hospital bed with an infant at her breast and Arnold sitting by her side. The presence of Arnold and the absence of Justin in this shot add to our suspicion that Arnold, not Justin, is the father of the baby, a suspicion established when we see a black baby in Tessa's arms. Because Justin is white and Arnold is black, Arnold appears to be the likely father. A shot/reverse-shot sequence between Tessa and Justin reveals a look of sadness on Justin's face, which furthers this impression. Not only does Justin appear upset, but he does not share the frame with Tessa. Instead, Arnold does.

It is only with Sandy's arrival and expression of sympathy that the truth of Tessa's stillborn infant becomes evident. The infant she is nursing turns out to be the son of a fifteen-year-old Kenyan girl who is dying as a result of drug testing by a British pharmaceutical company. The film misleads the spectator here in order locate us within the romance narrative and then reveal how the question of Tessa's fidelity merely obscures the political problem of Western capital's exploitation of Africa as a territory for experimental and dangerous drug testing. One might say that the indirect presentation of a political content effects a romantic seduction of the spectator into a politicized subjectivity. The wager of *The Constant Gardener* is that politics demands this indirection: we become politicized subjects only when some pathological motivation drives us onto the terrain of the political.

A CONSTANT STATE OF EMERGENCY

The infant that Tessa holds in her arms acts as an objective correlative for two different—and even opposed—responses. At first, the infant represents Justin and the spectator's fear that Tessa has betrayed him and that her romantic desires are directed elsewhere. A few moments later, however, the infant becomes the embodiment of Western capital's injustice. This transformation of the baby boy marks a fundamental transformation for the filmic spectator as well.

The typical Hollywood film set in Africa almost always uses the continent to tell a white and Western story. From Compton Bennett and Andrew Marton's *King Solomon's Mines* (1950) to Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa* (1985) to Hugh Hudson's *I Dreamed of Africa* (2000), to name just a few, Africa functions as a catalyst for the development of a Western individual or couple. Each of these films begins to some extent with an interest in Africa as such, but as the narrative unfolds, all concern with Africa recedes in the face of the Western individual's story.[6] *The Constant Gardener* reverses this trajectory, as the meaning associated with the infant evinces. The infant begins the scene as the indication of a white woman's desire and ends it as the embodiment of Africa's role as a testing ground for Western pharmaceutical giants. What begins as a standard romantic storyline about the wronging of a lover becomes a political storyline about the wronging of an entire continent.[7]

Despite the reversal of their narrative trajectory, *The Constant Gardener*, like *King Solomon's Mines*, *Out of Africa*, and *I Dreamed of Africa*, is fundamentally a white story, not a black one, and this would seem, in the end, to set it up for the same indictment on the level of its racial politics. It even plays on the white fear of black sexual potency through the depiction of Justin's jealousy surrounding Tessa and Arnold's relationship. The film goes so far as to encourage this feeling in the spectator. But it does so only in order to reveal the groundlessness of the fear and to show that the real danger lies in capitalist power and the British state, both of which are shown as thoroughly white. In contrast with other films centering on white European or American characters, *The Constant Gardener* presents a politicized Africa, in which American and European violence is visible, rather than an exotic Africa. The film does not, as other Western films about Africa tend to do, depict personal or private development in an exotic milieu but a development out of the personal into the political. As the film reveals itself as a drama of political awakening within the form of a romance, it becomes an implicit critique of films that exoticize Africa.

The turn from a romance story to a political one involves a change in temporality, which is why *The Constant Gardener* must have the narrative structure that it does. The kind of political commitment that

Tessa evinces stems from an authentic relationship to time. In both life and death, Tessa pulls Justin and the spectator out of an everyday or ideological relationship to time and into the atemporality of the drive, which is immersed in repetition rather than the narrative of progress. This atemporality, unlike everyday time, is rooted in what does not advance or go forward, in what blocks our progress. It is time without a future or a past. Atemporality doesn't imply that only the present counts or only the now exists but that what is fundamental to subjectivity doesn't change. Submission to atemporality politicizes the subject's existence because it removes all ideological consolations that inhibit taking action.[8] Within the logic of the drive, one lives a constant state of emergency in which no better future awaits and in which the necessity of the political act becomes exigent.[9]

The atemporality of the drive with which Tessa infects Justin stems from the specificity of the female subjectivity that she takes up. This subjectivity is not biological but a mode of relating to signification, a way of taking up one's position within the social order. It is available all subjects, and it provides the basis for Tessa's political engagement. Female subjectivity is "female" because it does not orient itself in relation to phallic signifier but in relation to the absence of this signifier.[10] As a result, the structure of female subjectivity is inherently political because it is attuned to the incomplete nature of the signifying structure. It emerges out of the real blockage on which every symbolic order runs aground. Unlike the structure of male subjectivity which is defined through an exceptional signifier (the phallus) that creates a closed set of men, female subjectivity has no signifier of exception, which means that the set of women is a set without a limit, an infinite set that must remain incomplete.[11] Ideology works on the basis of a masculine logic of exception because it must create the illusion of a whole—a whole society and whole identities—in order to provide a sense of social stability.

The difference between a masculine logic of the whole constituted through the exception and the feminine logic of incompletion becomes visible in the film when Tessa leaves the hospital after losing her baby. As Justin drives her home, they pass Wanza Kiluhu (Jacqueline Maribe) and Kioko Kiluhu (Donald Apiyo), the mother of the boy Tessa nursed and her younger brother, with the newborn.

Knowing that they must walk forty kilometers to their village, Tessa asks Justin to stop the car and offer them a ride. He rightly points out that helping three people among millions would not make a significant difference and, if it set a precedent, would lead to an impossible burden. He tells Tessa, "Be reasonable. There are millions of people. They all need help. That's what the agencies are here for." She responds, "Yeah, but these are three people that we can help." For Tessa, as for the logic of incompletion, we need not think of the whole that we can't help but only the exceptions that we can. According to this logic, there is no whole—only exceptions. The only possible justice works exception by exception without consideration of the illusory whole that it cannot alter. As long as we think in terms of transforming the whole, we will never get started politically. The logic of incompletion, the logic of a series of exceptions, allows us to begin to act without worrying that we can't make a fundamental difference in the world.

Tessa's logic avoids the dynamic of inside and outside that determines Justin's thinking. Meirelles indicates the exclusionary nature of Justin's logic through the very way that he films this scene. As Justin and Tessa debate the idea of offering a ride to Wanza, Kioko, and the baby, Meirelles shoots them from within their SUV. The shots are all in soft focus, so that the world outside the SUV remains blurry. The doors of the vehicle and Justin's logic serve to keep the external world outside. The only exception to the blurriness of the external world occurs when Tessa looks through her mirror and sees Wanza and Kioko walking toward them carrying the baby. Looking over Tessa's shoulder, we can see from the inside to the outside in a way that is impossible for our normal look (which is controlled by Justin's logic of the whole). For Tessa, there is no barrier between outside and inside, not because there are no exceptions, but because there is no rule or barrier constituting an inside.

By treating each case as an exception, the logic of incompletion forces the subject to treat each case as urgent. Looking at the big picture, the logic of the whole can afford to be patient and to wait for gradual progress. But when everyone waits, progress never comes. A focus on changing the whole world ensures that the whole world remains the same. The logic of incompletion—the logic that treats

every case as exceptional and works without regard for the whole—is the logic of political change and authentic temporality.[12] The point isn't that Tessa sees the "real human beings" where Justin sees only abstractions, but that she operates according to the atemporality of the drive. Though Justin wins this argument and drives away without helping Wanza and Kioko, he later converts to Tessa's logic and locates himself in the feminine position. It is at this moment that Justin becomes a target for political killing in the way that Tessa was. Occupying the point of ideology's own necessary incompletion, female subjectivity—a subjectivity founded in the logic of the not-all—presents a challenge to ideology's functioning.[13]

AN INCOMPLETE PROOF

The challenge that the logic of incompletion provides to ideology appears in other atemporal films as well. Like *The Constant Gardener*, John Madden's *Proof* (2005) depicts a conflict between a masculine logic of the whole and a feminine logic of incompletion, and it identifies the former as an ethical position. The film recounts the controversy surrounding Catherine (Gwyneth Paltrow), the daughter of a famous mathematician, Robert (Anthony Hopkins), who becomes insane at the end of his life. *Proof* begins a week after his death, as we see a young mathematician, Hal (Jake Gyllenhaal), comb through Robert's many notebooks in search of a great discovery. When he finally finds something important after days of fruitless searching, Catherine informs him that she, not her father, is the author of the groundbreaking mathematical proof. The subsequent revelations cast doubt on and then seem to validate this claim, placing the spectator in the position of Hal, not knowing exactly what to believe concerning the proof's authorship.

Hal is excited by the proof because he yearns for a career-making great discovery, and he laments to Catherine that he is already in his late twenties and thus past his mathematical prime. The film contrasts this attitude with Catherine's: she believes that one must simply occupy oneself with one's own drive without thinking about the great discovery that would garner recognition. Lamenting the state of his own research, Hal tells Catherine, "The big ideas aren't there." She

responds with incredulity, "Well, it's not about big ideas. It's work. You've got to chip away at a problem." For Catherine, the big ideas do not exist, or they emerge solely as the product of a drive that is indifferent to them. This is not simply an expression of pragmatism in the face of idealism, but rather—as the form of the film makes evident—an embrace of incomplete subjectivity. Catherine is the model of an ethical devotion to the atemporality of the drive because she does not look to the future for salvation. Instead, she accepts that there is nothing beyond incompletion and that the ultimate mathematical discovery would not provide the missing piece (either for a field of mathematics or for herself as a subject). The film's form follows this attitude: just as a sequence would reveal the complete truth, a cut to another temporality occurs that calls the completeness of the truth into question. The film aligns the embrace of incompletion and the temporality corresponding to it with the structure of female subjectivity (embodied by Catherine).[14]

The correlation between sexual difference and mode of temporality first becomes evident during an exchange between Catherine and Hal at the get-together following Robert's funeral. Hal points out that many mathematicians he knows turn to drugs for inspiration because they feel the future slipping away from them. In his conversation with Catherine, explicitly associates this attitude with young male mathematicians:

HAL: There's this fear that your creativity peaks at 23, and then it's all downhill from there.

CATHERINE: That's what my dad thought.

HAL: I guess all the really original work—it's all young guys.

CATHERINE: Young guys?

HAL: No, there are some women.

CATHERINE: Really, who?

HAL: There's a woman at Stanford. I can't remember her name.

CATHERINE: Sophie Germain?

HAL: Yeah, I think I've seen her at meetings, but I don't think I've . . . I've met her.

CATHERINE: She was born in Paris in 1776.

HAL: Then I've definitely never met her.

The interaction links Hal's ignorance of any female presence in mathematics with his explanation of the temporality of desire that characterizes male mathematicians who believe that only the future great discovery will redeem their work.

Hal's unquestioning investment in the future great discovery—and thus in the temporality of desire—is correlative to his resolutely male subjectivity. Madden shoots the conversation in a shot/reverse-shot sequence that contrasts medium-long shots of Hal and Catherine on opposite sides of the screen. The characters seem farther apart than one would expect them to be in the typical shot/reverse-shot conversation sequence. By accentuating the distance, the film accentuates the antagonism of sexual difference, an antagonism that involves competing modes of temporality.

Ironically, the film suggests that it is Catherine, the character not invested in the great discovery as a panacea, who makes the great discovery. It comes through her determination to "chip away at a problem." But there is finally no proof for her mathematical proof, no ultimate assurance that she is its author, even for the spectator. Madden edits the film in a way that initially calls into question Catherine's authorship of the proof. After we see Hal and Catherine's sister Claire (Hope Davis) claim that she couldn't have written it, a cut to an earlier sequence shows her father's seeming return to lucidity and productivity, which concludes with him handing her a notebook like the one containing the disputed proof. In the end, Hal accepts the proof as Catherine's (and the film leads the spectator to do so as well), but he must accept it without definitive proof, on the basis of incomplete evidence. Proof is always incomplete, just like subjectivity itself, and no cure exists for this incompletion. The ethical position derived from the structure of female subjectivity made clear in *Proof* allows us to embrace incompletion as the limit around which this subjectivity is organized.

In contrast, the temporality of desire derives inherently from the structure of male subjectivity. It banks on the future as a reservoir of possibility for the achievement of the ultimate pleasure, a pleasure thoroughly denied in the present. This pleasure is nothing but the ideal of noncastration theorized in terms of time. The atemporality of the drive recognizes neither future, nor past, nor present. It allows for no progress or movement forward because it locates enjoyment in the repetition of loss, not in the compensation for it. Female subjectivity's absence of an ideal of noncastration creates an opportunity for avowing the atemporality of the drive. By doing so, one implicitly defies the ideological justifications that derive from the logic of the whole and the temporality of desire.

NOT FITTING IN

The rejection of ideological justifications becomes apparent in the very onset of Tessa and Justin's relationship. She sits in the audience as Justin delivers a lecture in absentia for Sir Bernard Pellegrin. After he concludes the lecture and the crowd begins to disperse, Tessa stands and interjects a question that disrupts the dull and orderly proceedings. While everyone else attending the lecture politely applauds despite the thoroughly ideological—and thus spiritless—nature of the talk, Tessa questions, and she persists in her questioning even after the other attendees file out while she is talking. Even though Tessa announces clichéd objections to Justin's lecture, her passion is evident. She disrupts not through what she says but through how she says it—her insistence. The film registers the disruption she causes through Justin's behavior—his stammering and his inability to respond without contradicting himself. Later, she invites Justin into her home and has sex with him. Just as at the lecture, here Justin's response indicates the disruption that she causes. He awkwardly thanks her for the "gift" of the sexual encounter, and she mockingly says, "How very generous of me." Her interventions in the political and the sexual arena share a disruptiveness relative to the ideological presuppositions inhering in each.

When Tessa confronts Justin and asks that he take her to Africa on his diplomatic mission, her adverse relationship to the symbolic

structure again comes into view. This becomes apparent even before any words are spoken. Meirelles juxtaposes Justin's gardening with Tessa's intrusion through a deep focus shot that includes Justin's hands holding a small plant in the left foreground and Tessa in the background on the right of the image. In this one shot, the film lays out the fundamental choice that confronts Justin: he can continue to garden (that is, to play the role of ideological spokesperson), or he can become a politicized subject. Just as the spectator cannot look at Justin's hands and Tessa at the same time—one must shift one's focus from one to the other—so Justin must choose between apolitical gardening and the political commitment of Tessa.[15] And opting for political commitment here occurs through the choice for romance. Just as Justin allows Tessa to go for romantic reasons, the spectator is positioned to find her appealing because she offers an exciting romantic possibility for Justin.

By asking to go to Africa, Tessa disrupts the orderliness of Justin's life. It is clear that he enjoys her and that he wants her to come with her, but it is also clear that he feels apprehension. After he sees her and expresses his surprise, Justin asks, "How'd you get in?" Rather than respond with an answer or some other introductory niceties, Tessa simply begins with her request: "Take me to Africa with you." The baldness of the request adds to its shock, and in an attempt to mediate the shock, Justin tries to joke about the possibility, though he can't hide his own awkwardness. Finally, he begins a standard type of response, "Well, I'm flattered that you . . ." that Tessa interrupts by saying, "No, Justin, please don't say that." As he speaks this sentence, a reserve shot of Tessa furrowing her brow indicates her dissatisfaction. Justin says this in order to give himself more time, to delay the moment of decision. But although Tessa is willing to accept rejection, she refuses to accept delay. For her, the moment is urgent, and she wants Justin to adopt the urgency that she feels. She tells him, "Just yes or no." By confronting Justin directly and disallowing the customary reaction, Tessa works to free Justin from his position as an ideological spokesperson and to break the hold of an ideological relationship to time.

Though Tessa does not strictly obey the rules that govern interaction, she does not operate outside them. She raises her hand to

ask a question at Justin's lecture, and she addresses him politely when she asserts her desire to go to Africa with him. She is not a psychotic. But her relationship to the set of rules that govern our behavior is much more fraught than Justin's or that of most subjects. Because Tessa primarily exists in the atemporality of the drive, she remains focused on what the rules exclude, and she uses the symbolic structure to point to these exclusions, to what can't be said.

Tessa's alienation from any social identity manifests itself in the activity she engages in throughout the film. Though she insists to Justin that he leave her absolutely free to pursue her "work," at no point does the film associate her with an occupation or other identity. Whereas her colleague Arnold is identified as a medical doctor, we never learn anything about Tessa's college education or professional status. She is dedicated to her work—and she does file a report with Sandy and the British Commission on drug testing in Kenya—but she has no official position (that we know of) from which she does this work. The film omits this information not simply because it is unnecessary for the story but because the omission itself signifies. It highlights Tessa's refusal to submit to social restrictions, even those that inhere in identity itself. One might say that she is a freelance subject.[16] Her refusal of identity contrasts with Justin's willing submission to these restrictions, a submission that his gardening serves to render palatable.

Justin's gardening functions as his mode of avoiding political engagement and adjusting himself to symbolic restrictions. It is a private activity that provides an outlet for the desire that might otherwise manifest itself publicly as a political act. This is why, after Tessa's death, public officials such as Sandy and Sir Bernard encourage Justin to find refuge in his garden. To do so would be a way of avoiding the political act of inquiring into Tessa's death. To be a constant gardener, in the sense that the film proposes, is to align oneself with the law and its restrictions. Gardening allows the subject private pleasure as a compensation adhering to these restrictions, and the gardener works to sustain life, just as Justin works to prop up the British regime. He protects both his plants and the British power structure from possible disruptions.[17]

Gardening, as the film presents it, requires patient tending to the needs of one's plants. As a gardener, Justin works for a future toward which his plants slowly progress. He doesn't experience the irruption of the real that would highlight the necessity of acting. He doesn't experience a state of emergency. Every moment for him as a gardener is part of a web pointing toward the future. Justin's gardening is thus opposed to the atemporality that Tessa introduces. Atemporality foregrounds the trauma that the logic of female subjectivity poses to the ruling social structure, and Meirelles attempts to submit the spectator to this atemporality through the narrative form of the film.[18]

THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICIZED SUBJECTIVITY

Like other contemporary films that break from a chronological narrative form, the narrative of *The Constant Gardener* is constructed around a central traumatic event that the film continually encircles without ever straightforwardly depicting.[19] The trauma of Tessa's murder functions as the absent cause that triggers everything that happens in the film but which the filmic discourse fails to represent. Not only do we not see the murder itself, but the film also denies us the image of her murdered body. When Justin goes to the morgue with Sandy to identify the body, Meirelles restricts the perspective to a reaction shot of Justin and Sandy as the body is exposed. The murder has the status of a traumatic event within the terms of the film: it clearly happens, yet the film's symbolic structure can refer to it only indirectly. Within any symbolic system, the traumatic event is what cannot be signified. It is a stumbling block that both retroactively gives rise to the act of symbolization and functions as a barrier to the symbolic structure achieving completion. It is simultaneously what the symbolic structure is trying to symbolize and the indication of the inevitable failure of this attempt.

Meirelles centers the narrative of *The Constant Gardener* around the traumatic event in order to indicate Justin's immersion in the drive and to force the spectator into this position as well. Most films—especially most films depicting a romance—employ a narrative that follows the path of desire. Desire moves forward in a metonymic

fashion from object to object until it reaches an arbitrary end point, which is, at least in typical Hollywood films, usually the image of the successful romantic couple. Like Michel Gondry in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Meirelles confounds this structure. He does this not just for the sake of doing so or for the sake of creating an alienation effect in the spectator, but in order to create a political revolution in the spectator—to move the spectator from the temporality of desire to the atemporality of drive.

Justin begins the film—and his investigation into Tessa—as a desiring subject: he seeks the secret of her desire. But the investigation pushes him off the path of desire and onto the terrain of the drive. As a result of what he uncovers, Justin gives up his belief in Tessa's secret desire that he might access and embraces the unrelenting drive of her political mission. In the second half of the film, he becomes, like Tessa, a politicized subject of the drive. No amount of intimidation by the British government or by the KDH pharmaceutical company deters Justin from his commitment to exposing the ideological fiction that they have perpetuated. The film's form attempts to enact this politicization process that he undergoes on the spectator.

Even when the narrative of *The Constant Gardener* appears to advance in a traditional linear fashion, it follows the logic of the drive rather than that of the symbolic structure. The scenes that Meirelles includes do not so much advance the story as register the moments of repetition. In the first part of the film, these moments are almost always the result of Tessa's insistence on exposing what the ruling structure needs to keep hidden. The final scene of the film—Justin's death at the hands of a pharmaceutical company's hired guns—does not represent so much the conclusion of his investigation into Tessa and her activities but a repetition of her death. Justin goes to the place where Tessa was murdered because he obeys the compulsion of the drive, and through the depiction of this final scene, the film repeats her murder for a third time. We experience the event differently each time according to how our knowledge of her changes, but the event returns incessantly as that which we cannot overcome no matter how much mediation we employ. The death of Tessa marks the point at which the romantic and political narrative lines both

come together and diverge. It initially signifies Tessa's distance from Justin as a romantic partner, but it later represents the starting point for Justin's politicization.

There are, of course, empirical reasons within the filmic narrative for Tessa's death: she threatens to expose the murderous drug-testing practices of the pharmaceutical company KDH and the British government's links to these practices. But as the film makes clear, it is Tessa's insistence on refusing ideological explanations and consolations—the infinite nature of her subjectivity—that actually precipitates her murder. The empirical conditions are themselves contingent, but Tessa's death is necessary because of the position she occupies. Her politicized subjectivity is incompatible with the smooth functioning of the ruling power structure as it is currently constituted. Her very existence stands as a challenge to that structure, as a demand for a changed relation to the trauma that it represses. She indicts not just the institutions that perpetuate murder, but also the subjects who invest themselves in these institutions. Through her, the possibility of a politicized subjectivity becomes visible and even exigent.

As his investigation concludes, Justin follows Tessa and takes the leap into a politicized subjectivity. This occurs definitively during his visit to Dr. Lorbeer (Pete Postlethwaite) in the Sudan. Justin and Lorbeer flee an attack on the local village by climbing aboard a United Nations plane delivering aid. Justin brings a young girl from the village along with him, but the pilot rejects the extra passenger, claiming, "We're only allowed to evacuate aid workers. . . . There are thousands out there. I can't make an exception for this one child." Almost repeating verbatim Tessa's plea to him to save Wanza and Kioko earlier in the film, Justin responds, "This is one we can help. Here." At this point, the young girl jumps from the plane and runs away, rendering the argument moot. Though Justin's gesture doesn't save the girl, the scene depicts his conversion to Tessa's logic of incompletion. The pilot argues in terms of the whole and the ineffectiveness of helping a singular individual; Justin sees nothing but singular individuals, nothing but exceptions to the rule. Following Tessa's example, he has become a fully politicized subject, as he grasps the urgency of singularity itself.

The contrast between Justin's speech at the beginning of the film and the funeral oration delivered by Tessa's cousin Ham at the conclusion provides a symmetry to the film that illustrates what politicization entails. The former speech involves Justin reading Sir Bernard's speech justifying British foreign policy to a bored audience. Fernando Meirelles films the end of the talk with alternating long shots of Justin reading the text at a podium in a darkened room and reaction shots of antsy audience members (one shot of a woman scratching her head, another shot of people quickly gathering up their belongings in order to leave). In this scene, Justin is literally the mouthpiece of official ideology, which is why the lecture is so tedious. Ideology here speaks through Justin, even though, as his exchange with Tessa after the talk reveals, he doesn't fully agree with it on a personal level. The problem is that Justin's personal views remain at this time merely private and thus do not have a political effect.

When Tessa reproaches Justin for British involvement in the Iraq War, he deviates from Sir Bernard's position and expresses his philosophical sympathy with her position. In response to the groans that Tessa's statement induces among the remaining audience members, he defends her and claims, "I think that the questioner is making a valid point and that a nation's foreign policy should not be dictated by narrow commercial interests." Rather than appreciate this gesture of sympathy in response to her critique, Tessa becomes even more agitated. She says, "That's bullshit. That's bullshit. You have to take responsibility. You are being paid to apologize for this pathetic country, Britain."[20] As Tessa recognizes, Justin's personal distance from what he read makes no real difference. In this scene, he is nothing but an ideological puppet.

Throughout this scene, not only does Justin mouth the official position of the British government, but Meirelles uses the mise-en-scène to identify him with ideology. The performance of Ralph Fiennes highlights the fact that Justin is speaking words that belong to someone else. He reads the speech competently but with enough hesitation to indicate that these are not the words he would choose. Even more importantly, after he concludes the speech, the window shades (which completely keep out external light) rise and sunlight streams into the room. The darkness provides an appropriate setting

for the dissemination of ideology, and Tessa's challenge to the proffered ideological explanations seems to be the force that brings in the light. The rising of the shades occurs just after Tessa begins her question concerning British involvement in the war. External light can penetrate the dark aseptic lecture hall only after the speech because the delivery of the speech is self-justifying and not open to questioning.

Like Justin at the beginning of the film, Ham reads a text from Sir Bernard at the end of the film. But the ideological valence of these two events differs dramatically. Whereas Justin's reading places him in the position of an ideological spokesperson, Ham's reading exposes the underside of that ideology. When Ham reads Sir Bernard's self-incriminating letter to Sandy at Justin's funeral, his speech, though it employs signifiers, articulates what can't be said within the ideological framework. By doing so, it dislodges social power. At the moment Sir Bernard recognizes that Ham is reading his letter to Sandy and revealing the secret involvement of the British government in murderous African drug testing, he gets up to leave. Whereas the tedium of the earlier lecture sends the public streaming from the room, this reading has this effect on the figure of social power. The public reading of the letter drives Sir Bernard from the funeral, hounded by television and newspaper reporters, because his position depends on sustaining a certain ideological fiction. Because Justin attains a position where the strings of social power no longer hold him, he is able, through Ham, to attack Sir Bernard from the position where the ideological fiction breaks down.

The final scene of the film—Justin's return to the site of Tessa's murder and his acceptance of his own murder there—seems to reassert the primacy of the romance between Justin and Tessa over the emergence of his politicized subjectivity. But his act here coincides with Ham's public rendering of Bernard's letter: his funeral provides the forum at which Ham can read the letter, even though the film depicts Ham reading the letter prior to the depiction of Justin's death. The romantic undertones of Justin's final act obscure its thoroughgoing political nature. Justin can accept death in the way that he does only because he becomes a politicized subject.

Justin makes no effort to hide from the henchmen of KDH seeking to kill him, and when they arrive at the spot where Tessa was killed, he shows no resistance at all and almost welcomes them, even though he knows precisely what their arrival portends for him. It is difficult not to see Justin's actions at the end of the film as suicidal. He patiently waits for death and almost seems to hope for it. But this would be a misreading. Justin neither tries to die nor tries to survive at the end of the film. Because Justin finally accedes to atemporality, he can die without panic. He no longer exists in an everyday relationship to time in which he can expect a different future and recall a different past.[21]

Justin's actions at the end of the film make clear that opposite of the political passivity implicit in the ideological conception of time is not, as we might imagine, full activity. The political acts that both Tessa and Justin accomplish—and that the film enacts on the spectator through its narrative strategy—derive from another kind of passivity, a nonideological passivity. To enact the politicization that the film hopes to enact, spectators must submit themselves, as Tessa and Justin do, to the path of the drive. One acts through this submission, not in spite of it or outside of it.[22] Submission to the repetition of the drive enables one to act politically in order to change the world. Paradoxically, one can fundamentally change the ruling structure only by embracing one's unchanging drive.[23]

Though both *The Constant Gardener* and *Being and Time* critique the ideological relationship to time that conceives time as an infinite series of nows, the alternatives that they propose differ radically. For Heidegger, authentic temporality involves accepting one's constitutive finitude and being-toward-death. In this position, one constantly experiences the limit that time represents and comes to grasp the productivity of that limit. Existence itself becomes identical—and reduced to—the limits of finitude. In contrast, *The Constant Gardener* sees the embrace of finitude as yet another version of the ideological relationship to time (or a failed attempt to escape it). By fully acceding to the limit of its finitude, the subject fails to see the possibility of transcending limits. The embrace of finitude misses, in other words, the infinite nature of subjectivity itself, which is the origin of the subject's political drive.[24]

Ironically, the only authentic temporality, as Fernando Meirelles conceives it in *The Constant Gardener*, involves submitting to the timelessness of the drive. Authentic temporality is atemporality. This does not mean that the subject evades death or the variegations of finitude by attaining eternal life. But it does emancipate the subject from the concerns of bare life or survival.[25] The subject of the drive experiences the urgency of the moment not, as would be the case for Heidegger, because time is running out, but because such a subject cannot wait. Every moment provides an occasion for sustaining the path of the drive, for enjoying one's lost object in its absence. Every moment is equally missing. Subjects who adhere to this path immunize themselves to ideological seductions. The drive is not seeking satisfaction, but has already found it (through the repetition of a missed encounter), and this self-satisfaction permits a break from the appeal of ideology.

The final images of Justin in the film do not include his killers. We see an extreme close-up of his eyes as he acknowledges their arrival, and then we see a close-up of his face as he turns and closes his eyes, bracing for the gunshots. Meirelles excludes the killers from the end of this scene in order to underline the status of Justin's subjectivity at this point. He has entered into the repetition of the drive, attained a politicized subjectivity, and achieved a position of indifference relative to the demands of the others that surround him. His is the extreme freedom that *The Constant Gardener* calls us to experience.

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"Something Is Lost"

The Ethics of Absolute Negativity in *21 Grams*

THE END OF REPRODUCTION

When Lee Edelman launches his incisive and ultimately compelling attack on the prevalence of a reproductive ideology—an ideology that views social and physical reproduction as the fundamental goal of our existence—in contemporary American society, it is not surprising that the main target for his critique is the cinema. In *No Future*, he contends, "the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse—to prescribe what will *count* as political discourse—by compelling such discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address."[1] Though obviously not every film ends with the birth of a child, the reproductive couple does have a privileged place in filmic narrative structure, especially coming from Hollywood.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Michel Gondry, 2004) and *The Constant Gardener* (Fernando Meirelles, 2005) work so hard to redefine the romantic union because the creation of the heterosexual couple functions in some sense as the fundamental task of filmic narrative. This couple is always looking to the future as the reservoir of meaning that will validate the events that the audience has just witnessed. The future-oriented romantic union that concludes so many

filmic narratives stands as a synecdoche for the victory of presence over absence and success over failure. The instances of lack that define the narrative movement of any film disappear beneath the image of full presence connoted by the romantic couple. This image of a pure satisfaction that will last into the foreseeable future is the reward that redeems previous failures and allows us to forget them.

Alejandro González Iñárritu's *21 Grams* (2003) appears at first glance to be yet another exemplar of reproductive ideology that appears somewhat disguised by the film's atemporal structure. The film depicts the intersection of three central figures: Cristina Peck (Naomi Watts), Jack Jordan (Benicio Del Toro), and Paul Rivers (Sean Penn). Cristina loses her husband and two daughters when they are run over by Jack, a zealous Christian convert and reformed alcoholic, who hits them after a friend seduces him into drinking again.[2] Doctors transplant the heart of Cristina's dead husband into Paul, whose own heart is failing. After separating from his wife Mary (Charlotte Gainsbourg), Paul tracks down Cristina and begins a romance with her. The film concludes with Paul's death (which is the result of him shooting himself and his body's rejection of the new heart) and the image of Cristina pregnant with Paul's child.

Combined with Paul's final voiceover, which envisions a balance of loss and gain in death, these concluding events seem to suggest that the film subscribes to the capitalist and heterosexist ideology that sees reproduction as the ultimate end. Iñárritu's film appears to emphasize loss throughout only in order to show how loss leads to future gains, and how no loss is absolute.[3] According to Allan Cameron, it "allows crushed potentialities (in particular, the deaths of Cristina's children) to be balanced out by a new pregnancy (which may prove viable despite being jeopardized by Cristina's drug use)."[4] But such a reading misses the way in which *21 Grams* challenges both our usual conception of reproduction and our usual conception of success. According to the logic proposed by the film, the experience of loss is primary and absolute, and taking up the experience of loss—loss without any expectation of gain—constitutes an ethical imperative that provides the key to locating the subject's singularity. The film reconceives success as the product of the embrace of loss rather than its repression or transcendence.

This becomes most apparent through the film's narrative strategy. Iñárritu edits the film in an atemporal fashion that highlights the spectator's loss of mastery. He cuts between different temporalities and forces the spectator to infer the order in which they take place.[5] For instance, the film opens with Paul sitting on a bed next to Cristina sleeping. The next scene shows Cristina's husband and daughters leaving a restaurant, followed by a scene depicting Cristina in group therapy. Then we see a group of scenes in which Jack tries to convince a troubled youth to commit his life to Christ. As a result of this editing strategy, for much of the film the spectator meets with a failure to produce the proper story (or fabula) out of the film's discourse (or syuzhet). This failure is not simply an accident of the editing process, but rather a redefinition of successful spectatorship. The structure of the film demands an initial misunderstanding that later information will correct.

But misunderstanding is not the crucial dimension of the film's narrative structure. Many filmic narratives rely on initially leaving spectators in the dark and subsequently providing illumination, but the narrative structure of *21 Grams* goes much further. It does not allow spectators to experience a sense of gain without recognizing the link between gain and loss. Iñárritu uses the editing style of the film to stress the ubiquity of loss, and to emphasize how loss outstrips every gain. In this sense, *21 Grams* tries to imagine an alternative experience of the cinema in which we experience directly the absences and failures masked by the illusory presence of the images.[6]

A TRAUMATIC NARRATION

21 Grams demands a rethinking of the nature of narrative structure. We typically think of narrative trajectory as the movement toward an end. As Peter Brooks notes, "If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end."[7] Narrative desire is organized around the end because the end provides the solution to the questions of meaning that the narrative structure itself has aroused. At the end of a narrative, we understand what we didn't understand at the beginning or

in the middle. Even films that violate the norms of narrative structure by moving in a nonlinear fashion cannot avoid creating spectator knowledge where there was a lack of knowledge. Even the nonlinear film necessarily identifies the end with a hitherto absent knowledge.[8]

In one sense, *21 Grams* fits this universal schema perfectly. Despite the fragmentary and nonlinear narrative structure and despite several frustrations, spectators arrive at the end of the film with an understanding of the underlying story that they lacked while watching the beginning of the film. The film's structure has the effect of delaying this knowledge and frustrating the desire for it for longer than typical films do, but the film does not disrupt the fundamental schema itself. What is disruptive to the traditional narrative schema is the way that the film's structure arrests all forward narrative momentum. Rather than moving toward what Edward Branigan calls "a measure of completeness," the narrative encircles a traumatic event that it cannot narrativize.[9] Though the spectator's knowledge in *21 Grams* does move forward, the movement of the narrative is fundamentally one of return. It is as if the film's central traumatic event—the accident in which Jack kills Cristina's entire family, including her husband Michael (Danny Huston) and daughters Cathy (Carly Nahon) and Laura (Claire Pakis)—exerts a gravitational force that pulls the narrative back and never allows it to move beyond the essential trauma.[10] In this way, the narrative itself takes on the structure of the drive and submits the spectator to this structure.

In one sense, this relationship between the traumatic event and narrative has existed since the time of classical realist novel. One can see in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) an anticipation of the structure developed in *21 Grams*.[11] Though the novel does not disrupt chronological time in the manner of the film, it does include a founding and unnamed trauma that forces the twenty-three-year-old heroine Lucy Stowe to migrate to a foreign land where she undergoes a series of traumas that echo the initial one, including the suggestion that the man she loves, Paul Emanuel, dies in a shipwreck at the end of the novel. The novel places the absent trauma at the center, and the subsequent events in the narrative revolve around it. By adding a formal structure that breaks with chronology, Iñárritu thematizes this form, bringing to light the idea implicitly guiding it.

Within the narrative structure of *21 Grams*, the traumatic event exists on a different plane than all of the other narrated events. It is a nonsensical point within the narration, akin to what Freud calls the navel of the dream. In his discussion of dream interpretation, Freud contends, "There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown."[12] The dream's navel is the center around which the logic of the dream turns; it provides the basis for the dream's sense without itself being comprehensible. Every film has a similar point, I would contend, though different films emphasize this point to a greater or lesser extent. One can interpret a structure of signification—a dream or a film or any text—but one cannot interpret every element within that structure. There must be a point of nonsense or meaninglessness that acts as a foundation for the interpretation, a point that allows the interpretation to stop rather than continuing infinitely. The navel of the dream or of the film is at once meaningless and the key to all meaning within the text because it marks the place where meaning stops.[13]

By placing a traumatic event so clearly in the position of the navel of the film and foregrounding this event, Iñárritu creates a narrative structure that reveals how trauma distorts and reshapes our sense of temporality. Trauma produces a repetition that resists but interacts with temporality. Though we tend to think of temporality as that which allows the subject to break free from the rigidity of social constraint—time is the source of possibility—Iñárritu's narrative structure suggests that the singularity of the subject emerges only when we embrace the repetition produced by trauma, when we cease to look to the future as a reservoir of possibility. Temporality represents a false exit that leaves us utterly determined by the repetition we are trying to escape through time. Time does not heal all wounds but leaves us perpetually stuck in the wound's aftermath.

For Gilles Deleuze, in contrast, time is liberation, and it is the modern cinema that reveals the precise nature of time's liberatory power. He contends, for this reason, that the cinema is philosophically fecund: it produces a revolutionary concept of time. Through aberrant movement or the crystal-image that reveal layers of temporality, cinema demonstrates time's capacity for shattering clichés and

allowing the new to emerge. Time breaks the reified molds created by ideological representation and escapes the blind alley of necessity. In this sense, temporality, as Deleuze sees it, has nothing to do with chronology but instead marks the irruption—or the potential for the irruption—of contingency within the monotonous drone of chronological necessity. The time of the clock represents the rule of the factory, but the temporality of the modern cinema paves the way for emancipation from this servitude.

The problem with Deleuze's celebration of temporality and the time-image stems from where it locates singular being. According to Deleuze, one arrives at singularity by escaping the world of representation and determination. He locates singularity in the aberrant movement of contingency, in the possibility of moving forward in an utterly new direction and thereby breaking from all entrenched modes of being. One attains singularity, as Deleuze sees it, through deviation. But this understanding misses the link between singularity and the necessity of trauma. The subject acquires its singular being through the traumatic cut that defines it as a subject. Though the form that this traumatic cut takes is contingent, the cut itself is necessary. Without the traumatic cut, singularity cannot emerge because the cut allows the subject to distinguish itself from the rest of being.[14] Without the traumatic cut, one remains in a position of absolute dependence, no matter how much one tries to deviate from expectations. It is when subjects return to their defining trauma through repetition that they make manifest their singularity as subjects, not—as Deleuze would have it—when they seek refuge in the aberrant movement of contingency that temporality provides.

Before the scene in which it occurs, Iñárritu introduces the film's central traumatic event—the accident that kills Cristina's family—to the spectator through a number of scenes that happen close to it in time. The second scene of the film, for instance, depicts Michael and the girls at a restaurant where they are eating before walking home. Later, we see Cristina coming home to find no one there and then to receive a telephone call that would inform her about the accident. As the scene where the accident takes place approaches, the adjacent scenes become more frequent. Iñárritu depicts Cristina entering the hospital and then follows this with a party at Jack's house where

we see Jack drive home and tell his wife about the accident. The increasing pace of the scenes that allude directly to the accident underline its importance and affirm its place at the center of the narrative structure in *21 Grams*.

Iñárritu shoots the accident itself by highlighting its absence from the visual field rather than its presence. In the scene, Michael and the girls walk past a gardener, Lucio (Carlo Alban), blowing leaves in a neighborhood yard. Michael talks to Lucio about working in his garden, and as he and the girls walk past, Iñárritu leaves the camera on Lucio. After a close-up of his face as he uses a leaf-blower, Iñárritu cuts to an extended long shot of this activity. Seventeen seconds into this shot, Jack's truck, hardly recognizable, speeds past as a blur in the foreground. Six seconds later, we hear the sound of a skid, at which point Lucio turns to look down the street. As he sees the accident, Lucio runs to help, leaving his leaf-blower running while it lies on the grass. The shot doesn't follow Lucio to the accident but stays focused on the abandoned leaf-blower for an additional ten seconds. The thirty-eight-second shot is the longest of the film, and yet what is most significant about the shot is what it doesn't show, not what it does. Even though the accident occurs within earshot of the camera, we do not hear anything but the skid of car tires. There are no screams or cries, just the hum of the leaf-blower. The extended shot of the abandoned leaf-blower is the crucial shot of the film because it allows us to see our own inability to see the traumatic event.[15] The event is, to put it in the terms of Robyn Warhol, unnarrated: the film marks it as a blank space within its narrative in order to underline exceptional status.[16]

THE UNNARRATED TRAUMA OF LANTANA

By leaving the central traumatic event as a blank space within the narrative, a film can affirm its singularity through emphasizing its incongruity with what comes before and after. Thinking in terms of temporality leads us to expect that causes will lead to certain effects, but the traumatic event interrupts the regime of temporality and causality. It is a repetition of a loss that occurs without regard for the forward movement of time; it is a repetition that

we cannot anticipate or calculate—indicated by its absence. In Ray Lawrence's *Lantana* (2001), the central traumatic event is the disappearance and death of Dr. Valerie Somers (Barbara Hershey), an event that first appears as a blank space within the narrative. As the film makes evident, Somers dies because she thinks temporally and anticipates a future trauma.[17] That is, anticipating an incipient trauma leads her to act in a way that causes her own death. The atemporal structure of *Lantana* lures the spectator into the same error that befalls Somers: one anticipates the trauma to come and thereby completely misunderstands the trauma when it does come. By anticipating it, one fails to see loss as constitutive and fails to grasp the singularity of the trauma—its irreducibility to anticipation or expectation—which is what the film emphasizes through its atemporal structure.

Lantana largely follows a forward moving chronology: though it shows a variety of characters from different social arenas whose lives intersect in contingent ways, these intersections take place predominantly in a typical temporal order.[18] We see Detective Leon Zat (Anthony Lapaglia) cheating on his wife Sonja (Kerry Armstrong) with Janie O'May (Rachael Blake), and we see Sonja's therapist, Dr. Somers, having marital difficulties with her husband, John Knox (Geoffrey Rush). After depicting these interactions, the film leaves its central event, which involves Valerie Somers, unnarrated. When Somers crashes her car on a deserted road, we see her flag down a passerby, but after a fade to black, the film resumes with a shot of Janie O'May lying in bed and then looking out her window to see her neighbor Nik Daniels (Vince Colosimo) mysteriously throwing a woman's shoe into the nearby thicket after he arrives home in his truck. The next scene occurs the following day and depicts the police at the site of Somers's car crash, where they are investigating her disappearance.

The key to the atemporal structure of the film is not just the absence of the traumatic event, but also the film's opening, which occurs outside of a forward moving chronology. *Lantana* begins with a shot of a dead woman's body in a thick woods—the apparent result of some sort of violence. This opening informs our experience of the subsequent interactions between the characters and seduces us into considering who might become the victim of some violent act and

who might perpetuate it. Though it is clear that the body is female, the identity of the woman remains hidden because the slow moving tracking shot shows only her back, and the brush in which the body lies obscures any identifying features. Any woman in the film might be the future victim, and anyone might be the perpetrator of the violence.

The film uses an atemporal structure to trigger temporal thinking on the part of the spectator and to reveal the error inherent in this thinking. The image of the dead woman tempts the spectator to anticipate and calculate, and the film provides many false clues to aid in these efforts. An aggressive patient, Patrick Phelan (Peter Phelps), seems to represent a threat to Somers; her husband is hostile to her and seems to want out of their marriage; Leon Zat shows violent tendencies throughout the film; Sonja Zat has to fend off a potential rape. *Lantana* reveals an abundance of potential victims and potential killers, and it allows us to calculate who might be the most likely to have caused the death that opens the film and who might be the victim. These calculations, the film subsequently reveals, are all entirely misleading. In the middle of the film, it becomes evident that Valerie Somers will be the victim as she crashes her car and is stranded. And near the end of the film, we learn that there is no murderer.

In the end, *Lantana*, unlike *21 Grams*, renders the traumatic event visible. It remains unnarrated only until the conclusion of the film, when Nik Daniels explains to the police how he picked up Somers and how she jumped out of his truck when she wrongly believed herself in danger. As Nik narrates it and we see it visually, he took a short cut off the main road, and this act led Somers to believe that he intended to harm her. In response, she opens the door of the truck while it's moving and jumps out. When Nik tries to coax her back into the truck by explaining that he doesn't want to hurt her, she turns in the woods and runs, falling off a steep cliff. The film's conclusion thus reveals that the image of the dead body that opens the film was not that of a victim of violence but of an accident caused by the fear inherent in temporal thinking. Just like the spectator, Somers anticipates a future trauma, and this leads her astray.[19] By inducing the spectator into her error, *Lantana* emphasizes the inescapability of loss and the additional loss that

we create when we try to escape it. The film is able to do this to the extent that it sustains absence within what it makes visible, just as *21 Grams* does.

SEEING WHAT ONE CAN'T SEE

Film is a medium of visibility. It allows spectators to see events that are impossible to see—either empirically impossible or ontologically so. For instance, Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* [*Contempt*] (1963) places spectators in the apartment of Camille (Brigitte Bardot) and Paul (Michel Piccoli) so that we can have a perspective of the implosion of their relationship that no one could possibly have. And John Amiel's *The Core* (2003) offers spectators external shots of a ship plunging through solid rock, where there is no external space in which to place a camera. In both cases, film provides an impossible visibility (from an impossible perspective), and this rendering visible of the impossible constitutes one of the cinema's chief attractions, as well as its inherent link to voyeurism. But the regime of visibility that film as a medium institutes has the effect of eliminating the specificity of particular events. If every event can be made visible—even the most private moments of a couple's relationship or the trajectory of a ship moving through solid rock—then no event stands out as exceptional. By imposing its regime of visibility on everything it encounters, film generalizes our experience and illustrates the exchangeability of all events within that regime.[20] Nothing can stand out, which means that trauma—by definition, what stands out—has difficulty finding a place in the filmic medium.

But *21 Grams* challenges the filmic regime of visibility. Its entire focus revolves around what is not seen or even heard. Iñárritu leaves the central trauma outside of the visual and audio field in order to underscore its irreducibility to all other events within the filmic diegesis. The trauma shapes the narrative structure but does not participate in that structure, and no effort to integrate it into a narrative can succeed. To narrate the trauma—to align it with the other events of everyday life that the film depicts—is to violate its absolute singularity. To narrate the trauma is thus to fail to narrate the trauma, which

is why Iñárritu registers only the film's failure to capture it. The shot of the leaf-blower is a successful failure: it successfully grasps our inability to integrate the traumatic event.[21]

The relationship between the traumatic event and filmic narrative is not simply an issue for narrative theory or for film theory. It also concerns the nature of existence under capitalism. By affirming the singularity of the traumatic event and its structuring role in the formation of narrative, *21 Grams* attempts to carve out an aesthetic that overturns the prevailing mode of thought underwritten by the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism proceeds from an utter indifference to all singularity: once an object or a subject enters into capitalist production, it loses all specificity. As Marx points out in volume 3 of *Capital*,

> Capitalist production as such is indifferent to the particular use-values it produces, and in fact to the specific character of its commodities in general. All that matters in any sphere of production is to produce surplus-value, to appropriate a definite quantity of unpaid labour in labour's product. And it is similarly in the very nature of wage-labour subjected to capital that it is indifferent to the specific character of its work; it must be prepared to change according to the needs of capital and let itself be flung from one sphere of production to another.[22]

On both the side of the produced object and of the laboring subject, capitalist production creates uniformity. Capitalism tolerates all types of difference on the level of content because it stamps its form on every product and on every laborer it encounters.

Capital's indifference to difference does not emerge out of thin air but repeats the indifference of the signifier itself. Every system of signification, like capitalism, reduces the particularity of what it signifies in the very production of meaning. Meaning, as anyone who has ever used a dictionary knows, is nothing but the exchange of signifiers: one signifier replaces another in the world of universal replaceability, which is the system of signification. Capital's indifference to particularity works so well because it has its basis in our very capacity to speak.

But this is not to say that capitalist relations of production are somehow inevitable for speaking beings. Though the signifier eliminates particularity through the process of signification, its universalizing power also gives birth to singularity. To name an object (or a subject) for the first time is to give it an essence (or a soul) that transcends the system of signification giving rise to it. This is the work performed by what Saul Kripke calls the "rigid designator." The rigid designator provides an identity that remains the same when all else changes, an identity irreducible to other signifiers and thus nonsensical.[23] The rigid designator or name provides the point within the system of signification that stands out, but it stands out only on the basis of its nonsensical status. If we could define a name, it would immediately become exchangeable. Because the system of signification has a place for the singularity of names, it also has a place for trauma.

Capitalism, in contrast, systematically refuses the dimension of signification that introduces singularity into the world. To affirm singularity is to affirm the inevitability of absolute loss—loss without the possibility of compensation or exchange. When the singular disappears, there is no recompense of any sort, and capitalist relations of production cannot abide this inability to exchange. Traumatic events have no place within capitalist relations of production. When confronted with them, the capitalist structure immediately sets to work to eliminate their singularity.

Capitalism's resistance to absolute loss has its objective correlative in the form of general wealth, which is money. Money represents the commodity, but through this representation, it transforms the commodity's relationship to time. As Marx explains in the *Grundrisse*, "If money appears as the general commodity in all places, so also does it in all times. It maintains itself as wealth at all times. Its specific durability. It is the treasure which neither rust nor moths eat up. All commodities are only transitory money; money is the permanent commodity."[24] Though particular commodities decay and disappear in time, the form of money allows the value produced in the commodity to become immortal.[25] The value that money embodies does not disappear, even if individual coins or bills do; it is transferred to coins or bills that carry it on to the infinite future. The inability of money in its form as general wealth to register loss

is symptomatic of capitalist relations of production. Within capitalist society, loss exists only insofar as it points toward a future gain.

PROFITING ON LOSS

Nowhere is the inexorable transformation of loss into gain more evident than in the realm of organ donation, which is where *21 Grams* most clearly intersects with capitalist logic. The very concept of organ donation inherently represents the sine qua non of a capitalist logic that refuses trauma.[26] The exigencies of the process—the dying giving life to the living, the speed with which the organ must be harvested, and so on—necessitate that those involved repress any sense of the singularity of trauma. It is not surprising that organ donation gives rise to paranoid fantasies, articulated most clearly in Michael Crichton's *Coma* (1978), which is about killing people in order to harvest their organs for others. When doctors and hospital employees try to sell the idea of organ donation to a grieving survivor, they inevitably stress the importance of someone gaining from the loss of life, and they must do so in a way that intrudes on the grief of the survivor, no matter how delicately they approach the question.

In Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), the intersection of organ donation and the market appears straightforwardly. The film shows an underground organ harvesting organization that preys on the desperation of immigrants and the lower class, who agree to sell their organs to the wealthy. We thus see how easily the practice of organ donation fits into the exigencies of a market economy. But the film itself, despite its critique of the logic of the market on the level of content, falls back into it on the level of form in a way that *21 Grams* does not. When Senay (Audrey Tautou) submits to a kidney removal in order to finance her escape to America, her friend (and the surgeon) Okwe (Chiwetel Ejiofor) orchestrates a switch and operates instead on Juan (Sergi López), the crime boss in charge of the organ harvesting. This instance of poetic justice—the person making money harvesting organs ends up with his organ harvested—combined with Senay's successful escape to America at the end of the film, suggests, as do most films, that one can overcome loss by finding some recompense for it.[27] The formal structure of *21 Grams* eviscerates this idea.

The ideology of organ donation manifests itself in connection with the accident in *21 Grams*. Michael's death in the accident provides a new heart for Paul, who would otherwise have been dead in a matter of weeks. But rather than depict the organ donation as an occasion for death to produce additional life, Iñárritu completely undermines our usual thinking about the process. Just before we see Paul after the (apparently) successful heart transplant, the film shows him bleeding from a bullet wound in the backseat of a car. Here, he appears on the verge of death. Because Cristina is tending to him and Jack is driving the car, we know that this scene occurs after the transplant. Furthermore, the scene immediately following the transplant examination depicts Cristina at the hospital learning that her husband is in critical condition and that both of her daughters are dead. By surrounding the scene of the successful transplant with scenes showing both Paul and Michael on the way toward death, the film highlights the experience of loss even through the recounting of the successful heart transplant, an operation that uses death to produce additional life. The first scene reveals that Paul will receive only a very limited amount of life from the new heart, and the second makes clear the trauma of the loss that made the heart available. By framing the successful transplant in this way, Iñárritu's film forces the spectator to experience the failures at the heart of the success.

The scene depicting Cristina being confronted with the decision about organ donation begins the depiction of her as an ethical subject engaged with loss in a manner that other characters are not. While the woman from the organ donation program talks to Cristina about the possibility of using Michael's heart for a transplant, Cristina never looks up. The scene opens with the voice of the woman talking about the efforts of the doctors to save Michael, while we see a close-up of Cristina staring at the floor, unable to speak. When the woman says the words "organ donation," Cristina closes her eyes but remains silent. The scene ends with a shot of the woman saying, "this is a decision that needs to be made soon," filmed from behind Cristina's head. We see the blurry figure of the woman's head on the right side of the image, while the back of Cristina's head is in focus in the middle foreground. Rather than hear her response to this plea, the film cuts to a black screen and a beeping sound. This is the sound,

we learn subsequently, of Paul's beeper, indicating that Cristina has agreed to donate Michael's heart to Paul. Though she accedes to the request for organ donation, the film specifically excludes her acquiescence from the visual and audio fields in order to indicate her refusal of the logic of exchange. Cristina doesn't give Michael's heart to Paul so that she can feel like the loss is not absolute, but precisely because she registers that it is.

What defines Cristina as a character in the film—and what makes her the ethical center of the film—is her recognition that there can be no compensation for loss, that loss trumps every subsequent gain. After the death of her family, she is unable to resume even the normal activity of daily life. She falls back into her former drug use, from which life with Michael had rescued her. The loss of Michael and their daughters leaves Cristina inconsolable, an attitude that testifies to the singularity of the lost object. At the funeral home after their deaths, her father tries to comfort her with the standard consolation that "life goes on." He tells her, "When your mother died, I thought I wasn't going to make it. I felt the walls falling on me and that I was never going to get up. But, sweetie, life goes on." Rather than accede to this consolation or simply accept it, Cristina attacks the philosophy informing it. She responds, "You know what I thought when Mom died? I couldn't understand how you could talk to people again, how you could laugh . . . again. I couldn't understand how you could be with us. And no, no, that's a lie. Life does not just go on." Here, Cristina rejects the idea that life can overcome death. Death and loss mark life, for her, in a way that nothing can rectify.

LIFE DOESN'T GO ON

The attitude that Cristina displays while talking with her father continues to manifest itself throughout the film. After the funeral, Cristina rejects her sister's plea to press charges against Jack, telling her, "Nothing I can do is going to bring them back. Do you get that?" A desire for vengeance—or even for punishment—on her part would indicate an investment in the logic of exchange, the belief that a future event might compensate in some way for the loss. Though Cristina eventually encourages Paul to kill Jack in order to revenge the deaths

of Michael and their daughters, she first rejects the economy involved in this type of exchange, and it is this rejection that marks the registering of absolute loss.[28]

The film itself displays its allegiance to Cristina's position through the specific narrative choices that Iñárritu makes. Because he constructs the film in an atemporal fashion, Iñárritu can—to a greater extent than filmmakers tied to chronological time—organize events together in order to engage the spectator on a thematic level.[29] The structure of the film forces the spectator to view every success in light of a failure, every gain next to a loss that mitigates it. For instance, when we see Paul clandestinely watch Cristina swimming at the athletic club, the first indication of their incipient relation becomes evident, and we can anticipate Paul helping Cristina out of her melancholy state. But the next scene depicts Jack's old boss offer to buy Jack a few beers, which is what eventually leads to the accident that kills Cristina's family. As spectators, we experience the moment of potential rebirth—the onset of a new relationship—but the film immediately reminds us of the loss that made this relationship possible. Loss and failure occupy the privileged position within the film's narrative structure, and the circularity of that structure underlines the absolute status of loss.

The film contrasts the attitudes toward loss that Cristina and Paul's wife Mary display. Just after Cristina rejects her father's consolation at the funeral home and insists to him that "Life does not just go on," the film cuts to a scene in which Paul and Mary fight about her announcement to their friends that they are planning on having a child. Even though at this point Paul has a new heart, the idea of having a child with Paul comes to Mary in response to Paul's impending death. Their relationship remains troubled after their earlier separation, but she nonetheless wants him to father a child with her. Early in the film, we learn that damage to her Fallopian tubes will require surgery that will leave her unable to become pregnant until—or so she anticipates—after Paul will have died from heart failure. This barrier actually enhances Mary's desire for a child—she insists that he freeze his sperm for her—which she anticipates will provide a replacement for Paul after he is gone.

Mary is not a completely unsympathetic character. Despite being separated from Paul, she returns from England in order to care for him when his heart begins to fail, and she does everything that she can to keep him alive. Even though she appears like a superegoic figure at times (when she, for instance, upbraids Paul for smoking), she acts as she does with his best interest in mind. Nonetheless, the film ultimately condemns her concern for Paul because of its link to the logic of exchange and its refusal to accede to the absolute nature of loss. Her position marks the danger that the film cautions us against. In doing so, it affirms the claim of Walter Davis that "the danger is not that we cannot get beyond horror, but that we can."[30] Mary's ability and desire to move on represent the temptation, not the solution. The ability to move on or to find recompense provides the basis for additional trauma rather than offering a path beyond trauma altogether. Mary's desire to move on is precisely what precipitates her loss of Paul to Cristina, someone who has no such desire. The attempt to get beyond trauma ultimately fails to deliver on its promise, yet nonetheless costs the subject its singularity as a subject.

Of the film's three central characters, Jack bears the most resemblance to Mary Rivers. His investment in Christianity is an investment in the logic of exchange, in which a gain can compensate for every loss. When he tries to sell Christianity to a young gang member at the beginning of the film, Jack points not to the idea of sacrifice (which seems to be the essence of Christianity) but to the riches it provides. He proclaims that God gave him his new truck as a reward for his faith and that the truck embodies God's goodness. Jack proclaims a version of the Prosperity Gospel popular among many American evangelical Christians. According to this theology, God rewards believers with material success, and material success functions as the emblem of one's religious devotion.[31]

But as the subsequent events in *21 Grams* reveal, the gain that Jack's truck represents cannot provide a barrier to the experience of loss. In fact, God's gift to Jack becomes the very source of the accident that destroys Jack's life: he is driving the truck when he kills Michael and the girls. Though Jack believes that he finds a new life in Christianity, the accident makes clear that loss is inescapable, and this devastates him. Cristina's refusal to press charges allows Jack

to leave prison, but he cannot return to life with his family. Despite efforts to pray himself out of the experience of loss, Jack ends up leaving his family one night while they are sleeping because he is unable to deal with the guilt stemming from what he has done.

In the end, Jack appears to undergo a genuine rebirth and does return to his family. But this is only possible after he loses everything in the way that Cristina does: it is a return that embraces loss instead of trying to conquer it. Paul and Cristina track Jack to an old motel, where Paul confronts Jack with a gun and forces him to walk out into the desert. But rather than shooting Jack (as he promised Cristina he would do), Paul shoots the ground next to him. This execution scene, despite the fact that Jack does not die, permits him an experience of absolute loss. He believes at this point that he will die. It is only on the basis of this experience that he can begin a new life with his family at the end of the film.

Jack's renewed opportunity for life is also the result of an act by Paul later in the film. The night after Paul sends Jack away rather than executing him, Jack comes to Paul and Cristina's motel room in order to demand that Paul kill him. During the struggle that ensues, Paul and Jack both fall to the floor. At this point, Cristina begins violently beating Jack with a broken lamp, as Paul watches helplessly from the ground. Iñárritu shoots this part of the scene in silence. The sound doesn't return until we hear the noise of a gunshot, as Paul shoots himself to stop the beating. This act of sacrifice—Paul dies later at the hospital—allows Jack to live. It testifies to Paul's own recognition that real change requires an embrace of loss. Yet his act remains within a calculus that Cristina leaves behind. Paul sacrifices himself in order that Jack might live: his loss has a clear gain that it envisions, whereas Cristina finds her motivation in loss itself. Despite flirting with the idea of vengeance, throughout most of the film she recognizes the unredeemable nature of loss.

Paul's act of shooting himself saves Jack's life, and it also has the effect of curing Cristina's of her hostility toward Jack and leading her back to the ethical position that she has embodied throughout the film. Even though the ending of the film has a hopeful tinge to it, this is the position that the film itself continues to inhabit as well. The hopefulness of the film's ending coincides with a sense of

the irreparability of loss and the priority of failure. Hope is a viable possibility only when it sustains a connection to trauma rather than trying to overcome it.

A BABY WITHOUT REPRODUCTION

It would perhaps be instructive to contrast the end of *21 Grams* with another film that concludes with a pregnancy that occurs in response to loss. Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002) shows police chief John Anderton (Tom Cruise) fighting a frame-up that implicates him in a murder. Anderton's work as a police chief, which involves tracking down future criminals identified by three beings (called "precogs") who are able to see into the future, is motivated by the loss of his son years earlier to a kidnapper. The loss provides the background for all of Anderton's efforts at preventing crime, but the film shows the inadequacy of this compensation. No matter how many crimes Anderton prevents, he doesn't escape the sense of loss that stems from his inability to protect his own son. However, the film's conclusion suggests that an adequate compensation does exist: it depicts Anderton reconciled with his wife and reveals, through an image in which Anderton touches her enlarged belly, that she is pregnant.

The coming child, according to the logic of the film, redeems the loss and takes the place of the missing son. After we see Anderton's hand indicate the child's presence and importance, the film concludes with a scene that shows the liberated precogs living in peace, no longer condemned to the miserable existence they had while serving the police. Although not directly related to the image of Anderton and his pregnant spouse, this final scene reinforces the idea that narrative can lead us away from loss and can provide a gain that will counterbalance it. According to this logic, no loss is absolute; loss exists within a universe of exchange in which an adequate recompense exists at least as a possibility.[32]

The image near the conclusion of *21 Grams* that depicts Cristina sitting on her bed with an obviously pregnant belly almost directly mirrors the scene from *Minority Report* in terms of its narrative location. The scene operates in the same way—affirming future possibility

against the background of loss. Yet its place within the film creates a completely different effect. Unlike Anderton in *Minority Report*, Cristina accepts the absolute status of loss. Paul's wife Mary, who wanted a child to replace Paul after his death, is not pregnant at the end; instead, the pregnancy comes to the one character that finds no recompense for loss and refuses to resume her life after the experience of loss. The birth of the new in *21 Grams* emerges only when one grasps that nothing can make up for loss.[33] This becomes even more pronounced through the two scenes that conclude the film after the image of Cristina's pregnancy.

The film cuts from the image of Cristina to one of Paul lying on a hospital bed. We hear his voiceover say the final line of the film as a flat line appears on the heart monitor indicating his death. Here the order of the images is crucial: by showing Cristina's pregnancy before Paul's death, the film does not allow us to experience it as a compensation for that death. The new baby does not replace Paul but highlights the loss all the more, showing death intruding on life rather than the other way around. In order to experience it as a compensation, the spectator must perform a kind of internal editing that obliterates the formal structure that Iñárritu establishes.

The film's final image further punctuates the experience of loss, not permitting us to see that life goes on. Iñárritu ends *21 Grams* with a shot of a light snow falling on the dilapidated swimming pool at the motel where Paul and Cristina found Jack. The pool appears to have been forgotten: an old tarp partially covers it, it has no water, leaves and mud are strewn throughout it, and an old car tire lies inside. It appears as if no amount of work could transform this pool into a usable spot for recreation. This final shot highlights what humanity has left behind—the desolate image is bereft of hope; it is an image of emptiness, which emphasizes what is not there. The brown leaves have fallen from unseen trees, and there is no sign of the car to which the old tire might belong. The concluding image of the pool signifies absence itself, and the film suggests that it is only in the embrace of this absence and hopelessness embodied in the image that one discovers singularity.

Although a new or a clean swimming pool looks like any other new or clean swimming pool, the dilapidated pool that appears at the end of *21 Grams* is singular in its very dilapidation. Though one

might imagine many pools in a similar state, many pools that might be used to signify absence, none would be precisely identical. The neglect of this pool occurred in a specific way that marks it with an indelible singularity, just as loss in the case of subjects carves out a singularity in them. The mass production of new swimming pools creates sameness, and it is only the introduction of absence that can disrupt the regime of sameness, just as the traumatic cut of subjectivity disrupts the monotonous plenitude of being itself. By concluding with an image that highlights what is not there, Iñárritu underlines the film's commitment to contesting this regime.

Just before the shot of the pool, Paul's final voiceover occurs over the series of images that includes Cristina touching her pregnant belly and Paul dying in the hospital bed. This soliloquy lays out the film's philosophy of life and death in terms of gain and loss. Paul says,

> How many lives do we live? How many times do we die? They say we all lose 21 grams at the exact moment of our death. Everyone. And how much fits into 21 grams? How much is lost? When do we lose 21 grams? How much goes with them? How much is gained? How much is gained? 21 grams. The weight of a stack of 5 nickels. The weight of a hummingbird. A chocolate bar. How much did 21 grams weigh?

On the one hand, Paul's words reveal an emphasis on gain rather than loss. Although he says "How much is lost?" just once, he repeats, with an emphasis on the word "gained" the second time, "How much is gained?" But what is most remarkable about this voiceover is the tense of the final verb: Paul speaks about the weight of 21 grams—allegedly the weight of the soul that is lost at death—which is a constant over time and thus cannot require the past tense, as if it were past. For him, this final line suggests that there is no more weight to 21 grams because he himself is no longer. This slight turn in his phrasing indicates an absolute loss, the loss of his entire universe.

The end of *21 Grams* propels both Paul and Jack into the position of absolute loss that Cristina inhabits throughout most of the film. Through this loss, they find the singularity of their own subjectivity that has hitherto escaped them. Absolute loss enables Jack

to return to his family without the burden of seeking redemption because he realizes that no redemption is possible. Paul, for his part, finally discovers his subjectivity at the moment of losing it. In the trajectory that both Jack and Paul follow, the film registers the existential importance of loss and reveals how one might comport oneself in relation to it.

21 Grams appears to be a film about reproduction and the possibility for the birth of the new out of the old. This renders it vulnerable to the type of critique that Lee Edelman levels against reproductive ideology. But *21 Grams* does not partake of reproductive ideology; it is, in fact, a thoroughgoing rejection of this ideology. It challenges the forward movement of the cinema itself through a narrative structure designed to highlight the inescapability of loss. If the film ends with the indication of a future birth, it shows that not even this future life will emerge outside of the framework of loss. Watching *21 Grams*, one cannot find a reason to hope that tomorrow might bring respite from the dissatisfaction of today. As the film shows, the value of life itself derives from an absolute negativity injected into it, a negativity that no type of social order can recover or integrate. The aesthetic developed in *21 Grams* makes no effort to transform this negativity into a narrative of affirmation, but respects it in its absoluteness. It is only in the embrace of an absolute negativity that one discovers the irreducible singularity of the subject.

Timeless in Space

Placing Eternity in *2046*

THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF ETERNITY

In the *Timaeus*, Plato insists on an absolute distinction between time and eternity. The two are distinct to such an extent that they demand different forms of description: one should never employ the term "is" when talking about the temporal world in which everything becomes, just as one should never use "was" or "will be" when speaking of eternity in which nothing changes. Careless deployment of verb tense, according to Plato, leads to blurring the absolute nature of the distinction. Yet Plato nonetheless envisions a relationship between eternity and time in which time is "a moving image of eternity."[1] Eternity provides the model for the temporal world, which was created as an imitation of everlasting and unchanging being. As Plato lays it out, we can think of eternity and the temporal world only insofar as we think of them in relation to each other.

Though subsequent thinkers (especially in the twentieth century) have rejected the priority that Plato grants to eternity, they have continued to consider temporality and eternity in opposition. In the twentieth century, the temporal world gains the upper hand and becomes the model for eternity, which is, for someone like Martin Heidegger, a conceptual flight from temporality rather than the original and unchanging state of what is essential. The meaning of being resides

not in the mythic realm of eternity but in the evanescent moments of temporality.[2] The effort of Heidegger and his inheritors (Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida, and so on) is to struggle against both the explicit and implicit privilege that eternity has had within philosophy in order to assert the constitutive priority of the experience of time. One might think of Heidegger's project of overcoming metaphysics as an attempt to overcome the central position that eternity has had in the history of philosophy. According to this line of thought, there is no eternity except through the hypostatization of lived temporal experience.[3] Even as they reverse Plato, such thinkers retain the fundamental Platonic opposition.

This is true also of those thinkers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have tried to refigure eternity as a way of sustaining its philosophical privilege. For theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek, eternity represents the nonhistorical kernel within history—that which cannot be reduced to ceaseless flow of historical change.[4] Whereas Plato conceived of eternity as existing outside of time and history, these thinkers conceive of it as an internal rupture within history. They do so to preserve the possibility of a political act (what Badiou calls an event) that disrupts and transforms the very context that gives rise to it. Ironically, without a conception of eternity internal to time, one cannot conceptualize genuine historical change.[5] This way of figuring eternity as a rupture in the fabric of time gains an aesthetic expression in atemporal cinema, specifically in Steven Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* (1998).

Soderbergh's film recounts the unlikely love relationship that forms between Jack Foley (George Clooney), a lifelong bank robber, and Karen Sisko (Jennifer Lopez), a federal marshal. They meet when Karen interrupts Jack's prison break, which prompts him to take her along on the getaway (though she soon escapes). Soderbergh presents the film in a jumbled chronology, which begins with Jack being arrested and loops repeatedly back to an earlier time in jail, before concluding with a shootout that occurs during a robbery. Just prior to the final shootout, however, the film's key scene takes place. In it, Jack and Karen manage to come together for one night of romantic love, despite the fact that he is a fugitive whom she is pursuing. Karen never abandons her position as a federal marshal, and

Jack does not reform. Yet the film shows that love between them is nonetheless thinkable, even as their respective positions seem to render it impossible.

Out of Sight explicitly figures the love between Karen and Jack as an eternal event existing outside of time. When they meet in a hotel bar, Karen proposes to Jack that they take a "time-out" from their social positions, and Jack later echoes the term. Furthermore, Soderbergh shoots the event as a time-out from the temporal structure that characterizes the rest of the film. Though he uses freeze frames and temporal shifts elsewhere, the scene of Karen and Jack's romance foregrounds these changes in form in a way that the rest of the film does not. For the first time, we see overlapping scenes, so that Karen and Jack's meeting in the bar is formally integrated with their sexual encounter in the hotel room. This creates the sense that they are existing in a moment in which time does not move. Love creates an eternal rupture within temporality.[6] Both Karen and Jack return to their former positions after this event, but they are changed by it. The film suggests that the significance of this event outstrips everything else in their lives.[7]

The celebration of the eternal break within the flow of temporality in *Out of Sight* marks its kinship with contemporary thought, which is in the process of rehabilitating eternity after the twentieth century's philosophical assault on it. But this rehabilitation—both in *Out of Sight* and in philosophy—does not yet go as far in the direction of conceiving eternity as it might. Though this position rethinks the nature of eternity in a radical and politically fecund way, it remains prisoner to thinking about eternity through its relationship to time. As a result, the thinkers who advance it miss how the experience of eternity might not only change the movement of history but transform the nature of the desiring subject as such.

The great innovation of Wong Kar Wai's masterpiece *2046* (2004) is its refiguring of eternity. Through the transformation that the film enacts both within the diegesis and on the spectator, eternity ceases to exist in relation to time and comes to exist in relation to space. Wong's film doesn't spatialize just time in the manner of so many current atemporal films, but eternity as well. That is, it conceives of the eternal as a place existing in opposition to the places of everyday

life, not as an everlasting realm existing in opposition to the temporal world. The eternal is not just the nonhistorical kernel within history, but an unchanging place within space. This reconception of eternity allows it to become thinkable as a genuine position that the subject can access fully and occupy. But as the film shows, the subject constitutes itself as a subject through the distance that it maintains relative to eternity.

The film foregrounds the positioning of the spectator in relation to eternity, just as it does with its principal character Chow Mo Wan (Tony Leung Chiu Wai). Throughout the film, we see the series of relationships that Chow experiences during the time when he lives primarily at a hotel owned by Mr. Wang (Wang Sum). For Chow, each relationship comes up short of the one that he had with his former lover, Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung). This earlier relationship marks the entry of eternity into Chow's life. He clings to the memory of it and refuses to countenance the idea of a new love that would replace Su Li Zhen. His subjectivity is oriented around his love relationship with her, and he works to sustain the disruption that the singularity of this event has introduced into his life. Yet his subsequent relationships repeat the failure of his relationship with Su Li Zhen and thereby undermine its exceptional status. He fails to sustain a relationship with any of the women with whom he becomes involved—another woman named Su Li Zhen (Gong Li), Lulu (Carina Lau), Bai Ling (Ziyi Zhang), and Wang Jing Wen (Faye Wong)—and these failures repeat the failure that occurs with the first Su Li Zhen, though they occur for different reasons. The film ends with Chow alone and isolated, as the eternal bond with Su Li Zhen exists only as a memory and no new bond arises in its place.

In parallel with his depiction of Chow's series of failed relationships, Wong Kar Wai also relates the story of 2046, a signifier of eternity within the film.[8] 2046 is a location where, as the narrator of the film tells us, nothing changes. But just as the film doesn't show Chow's relationship with Su Li Zhen, it doesn't provide a concrete depiction of 2046. We have only Chow's voiceover description of its changeless nature. In both cases, the film paints the eternal as an accessible realm even as it denies the spectator (and Chow) access to it. This becomes possible because *2046* shifts the idea of eternity from its opposition to temporality into a relation with space.

The reconception of eternity in *2046* is significant because it works to effect a change in the spectators' relation to their own desire. As a concept, eternity represents the point at which desire would be realized. Even though this realization would have the effect of ending desire through its fulfillment (and thus is constitutively impossible), the idea of it nonetheless has a determinative influence on subjectivity, which is why so many psychoanalytically oriented political theorists call for a traversal of the fantasy that envisions desire's realization. Yannis Stavrakakis, for one, argues for an "alternative mode of *jouissance* [that] traverses the fantasy and encircles its own partiality."[9] Although this political project is unquestionably appealing, the barrier to it appears almost impossible to overcome. Who can desire without envisioning the fulfillment of that desire? As long as we conceive eternity in relation to temporality, the realization of desire will continue to appear as a future possibility, no matter how strenuously we proclaim that we don't believe in this possibility. But the fundamental wager of *2046* is that there is a way out of this trap. One can escape the lure of desire's future realization only when one grasps this realization as a possibility that one has already experienced.[10]

The key operation of the film—the turn that the film attempts to enact on its spectators—occurs in miniature within the first few minutes, though the film subsequently reproduces it on a larger scale throughout its narrative trajectory. This operation involves the transformation of a temporal category into a spatial one. The film locates eternity through the signifier "2046." In the first words and images of the film, 2046 designates a time (a future year), but almost immediately after the film establishes 2046 as a time, it identifies 2046 as a place to which one can travel.[11] With this turn from time to space, 2046 undergoes not just a conceptual but also an ontological transformation: as a place one can actually experience 2046, whereas as a future time one can only imagine experiencing it. To put it in the terms of Gilles Deleuze, the ontological status of 2046 shifts from being virtual as a future time to being possible as an alternate place.

According to Deleuze, the distinction between the virtual and the possible concerns the role that difference plays in each. The virtual allows for difference in a way that the possible does not. In his book on Henri Bergson, Deleuze claims, "While the real is in the image

and likeness of the possible that it realizes, the actual, on the other hand does *not* resemble the virtuality that it embodies. It is difference that is primary in the process of actualization—the difference between the virtual from which we begin and the actuals at which we arrive."[12] Conceived as a virtual time, 2046 remains beyond what can be experienced. But conceived as a possible space, 2046 becomes accessible. By rendering eternity accessible, Wong deprives it of its fundamental alterity, and in so doing he works to transform the spectator's relationship to desire itself, to dilute the power that the image of desire's full realization has over the desiring subject.

FROM TIME TO SPACE

In order to set up the transformation in the concept of eternity, *2046* begins with the suggestion that it is a science fiction film set in the future. After the credit sequence, we see colorful futuristic scene depicting a vast transportation network with rapidly moving trains. One assumes that this fantastic mise-en-scène represents Wong Kar Wai's vision of the year 2046, and the opening words of the film's narration support this assumption. But abruptly the narrator changes course and begins to talk about 2046 in a wholly different way. As the narrator describes it, 2046 becomes a place where travelers go for respite from change. He says, "Every passenger going to 2046 has the same intention: They want to recapture lost memories. Because nothing ever changes in 2046." As a place where nothing ever changes, 2046 has the essential characteristic of eternity, which the film clearly defines in relation to space.

In one sense, eternity, no matter how one conceives it, must always be thought in spatial terms, as thought itself has a spatial orientation. The conception of eternity in *2046* is thus fundamentally akin to any other. But what does distinguish the conception of eternity in *2046* is precisely the change that the film inaugurates in the way that the spectator approaches the concept: we begin by understanding 2046 in terms of temporality, and we move to seeing it in relation to spatiality. This transition is the key to the film because it radically changes the subject's—and the spectator's—relationship to the eternal. When the film transforms 2046 from a future date to

a place where nothing changes, it constitutes 2046 as accessible and overtly highlights this accessibility. Though no scenes take place in 2046, there are many depicting a Japanese traveler (Takuya Kimura) on the train that goes to and from 2046. Like many others (according to the film's narration), the traveler has been to 2046. Though it is an exceptional place, the film does not locate it in a realm beyond all possible experience. Bringing the eternal into the world of possible experience renders evident the perfect satisfaction—the realization of desire—that the idea of eternity promises.

The transformation from a temporal entity to a spatial one occurs elsewhere in the film as well. The coldest zones on the train going to 2046—zones 1224 and 1225—correspond to the numerical abbreviations for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, which are the days, according to the film's narration, when people need extra warmth. The narration makes the equation between the coldness of these zones and the coldness of the holidays, but it leaves implicit the transformation that the very existence of zones 1224 and 1225 suggests. Through these zones (which play no significant part in the film's narrative), *2046* further translates what we ordinarily conceive of as temporal periods (Christmas Eve and Christmas Day) into spatial entities. In the process, these holidays become, like 2046 itself, readily accessible in a way that their temporal status made impossible. As days of the year, 12/24 and 12/25 come along only at a certain time and are quickly gone. One cannot live these days forever. As zones on the train, however, 1224 and 1225 are, despite their uncomfortable temperature, habitable for a much longer duration.[13] But the possibility of access does not produce subjects who opt to make realize this possibility.

If 2046 signifies the place where a subject realizes its desire, the film *2046* shows that subjects work to maintain a certain distance from this place. Though subjects can go to 2046 and experience the eternal, there seems to be something dissatisfying about the perfect satisfaction that it offers. Though the film's narration says that no one has ever come back from 2046, the Japanese traveler does leave, and he provides the only available insight into the nature of 2046. By focusing on the only person who has come back from 2046, the film shows that satisfaction doesn't reside in accessing the eternal so much

as sustaining a certain distance from it. Through the act of sustaining this distance, the subject experiences its lost object as lost rather than obtaining it and thereby destroying the source of satisfaction—which lies precisely in the lost nature of the object. One can exist in 2046, but one can enjoy 2046 only from a distance.[14]

The same dislocation relative to 2046 occurs in the hotel where Chow is staying. He originally visits the hotel after encountering Lulu, a former lover, and returning with her to her hotel room. As he leaves, he notices that she is staying in room 2046, which prompts him to write a story entitled "2046." Two days later, he returns to the hotel to see Lulu again, but a jealous boyfriend has murdered her in the interim, though the hotel owner only tells Chow that she has left. Fascinated by the number 2046 (which was the number of the room he shared with the first Su Li Zhen), he asks to rent Lulu's old room, but the hotel owner claims that it's being redecorated and refuses. Because 2046 represents for Chow the experience of the lost object, he dismisses the idea of accepting another room. Only 2046 signifies the bliss of eternity. Eventually, however, the hotel owner convinces Chow to rent room 2047 and move into 2046 when it's ready. At this point, the promise of the future realization of his desire sustains Chow.

In room 2047, Chow occupies the same position as the traveler on the train going to and from 2046: he remains in the vicinity of satisfaction but is nonetheless removed from it. Just as the film creates the expectation of the train actually arriving at 2046, it prepares the spectator for Chow's eventual occupancy of room 2046. But this expectation is disappointed. Chow's narration notes that though they quickly finished the redecorations in 2046, he had grown accustomed to 2047 and decided to stay there. Given the significance that 2046 has for Chow, this decision, which he relates offhandedly, appears shocking, despite the indifferent way that Chow communicates it to the spectator. It was only the promise of living in room 2046 that induced Chow to take up residence at this hotel in the first place, but when the room becomes available, he refuses it without really giving it a thought. Through the depiction of this turn of events, Wong once again reveals the accessibility of eternity and the implications of this accessibility.

Chow refuses to move to room 2046 not because, as he says, he had grown used to room 2047, but because he grasps (albeit

unconsciously) that one best enjoys 2046 at a remove from it. If he were to move into room 2046, Chow would discover the emptiness of the room even after it was redecorated. The realization of his desire—the entrance into eternity—would make evident the ultimate emptiness of his lost object. By residing in room 2047 and remaining proximate to but at a distance from room 2046, he experiences and enjoys the object as a present absence. Occupying room 2046 is a possibility for Chow, and the room's very accessibility reveals the necessity of a certain distance from it. If room 2046 remained inaccessible throughout the film (or if eternity remained a realm constituted in opposition to temporality), we would not see the necessity of this distance. By displaying the accessibility of room 2046, the film *2046* works to relocate the spectator's sense of where enjoyment lies and to turn the spectator away from the promise of a future that would provide complete satisfaction. But this is a recognition reserved for the spectator. Though the film permits the spectator to recognize eternity as an accessible place, Chow, despite the distance that he keeps from room 2046, remains captive to hope.

Through the character of Chow, Wong Kar Wai displays the dominance of the traditional conception of eternity. That is, Chow believes that there is a secret lodged within the Other that he dreams of one day uncovering, and he thinks that the knowledge of this secret would bring the ultimate satisfaction.[15] He spends the entire film consciously seeking the lost object that would realize his desire and allow him to access the eternal. In the process, he rejects any available object for its inability to measure up to the object that exists only insofar as it is lost. This project leads inevitably to dissatisfaction, as it forces Chow to sabotage possible relationships and cling to impossible ones. But what Chow cannot see—and what the film allows the spectator to recognize—is that the failure of his conscious project underwrites the success of an unconscious one.

By repeating his failed relation with the lost object, Chow repeats the only experience of this object that one can have. His failure to realize his desire is in fact a successful failure. As the film shows, the lost object is not forever out of reach; the eternal does not exist in the infinitely removed future time but as a place in the present. One can access it—and one is constantly accessing it—insofar as it is lost, and

this mode of accessing the lost object occurs through the drive. In the grip of the drive, one enjoys the lost object through one's failure in regard to it. Chow experiences the lost object not as an absent presence but as a present absence, though he fails to recognize it as such.

The shift from viewing the object as an absent present to recognizing it as a present absence represents a transition from the logic of desire to that of the drive. Wong ensconces Chow in the former in order to submit the spectator to the latter. Because the narrative in *2046* moves according to the logic of the drive and its repetition, the usual rules of chronological temporality do not hold. It is not just that Wong presents a confusing filmic discourse that disguises a chronologically straightforward story, but that the film creates a sense that even the story is a realm in which temporal changes are not ultimately significant. As the film presents it, the passing of time is important only insofar as it allows the subject to continue to repeat an essential failure: no matter how much time passes, the subject gets no closer to its lost object. The first of Chow's interactions with a woman, which repeats his earlier failed encounter not seen in *2046*, appears to occupy a position at the end of the film's chronology, but one cannot ultimately be sure because the film leaves its chronological position ambiguous.

Chow's encounter with Su Li Zhen (Gong Li) seems to repeat an earlier encounter with her (in terms of the film's story) that takes place later in the filmic discourse. By reversing the spectator's experience of the temporality of the repetition—by showing the repetition before the event that it repeats—Wong demonstrates the priority of repetition over temporality. But even the original encounter with Su Li Zhen repeats an encounter with another woman named Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung), who represents the lost object for Chow. The spiraling repetitions have at their origin a missed encounter rather than a successful one: Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung) is lost to him, but Chow never actually had her. Their relationship has such a hold over him not because it was his one successful connection, but because it was his most magisterial failure. The first Su Li Zhen provides a model for inaccessibility.[16]

Each of Chow's love objects in the film is inaccessible for one reason or another: the first Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung) was married to someone else and exists now for him only in his memories; Lulu, the original occupant of the room 2046, dies just after Chow runs

into her again; Wang Jing Wen is in love with another man; and the second Su Li Zhen (Gong Li) is trapped by a past that doesn't permit her to let Chow into her life. The inaccessibility of each woman arouses Chow, but this very inaccessibility ultimately dooms him to repeating the same failure with each. Though time passes and the woman he pursues changes, the form of the failure remains the same.

The one exception among the woman with whom Chow involves himself is Bai Ling. With her, there is no barrier to a successful relationship. Just after Chow meets her, she leaves her boyfriend, and the film implies that she falls in love with Chow. Even though Bai Ling is working as a high-class prostitute, she stops seeing other men after she falls in love with Chow. At the hotel, Bai Ling lives next door to Chow in room 2046, and with her he is able to enter into 2046 both literally and metaphorically. But the relationship has no allure for Chow because Bai Ling lacks the inaccessibility that characterizes the other women and that constitutes the lost object as such. She cannot arouse Chow's desire, yet his relationship with her is the one that seems—but for his indifference—as if it might have worked out well. Chow breaks off his relationship with her precisely because of its potential for success and the stumbling block that it might erect on the path of repeating failure.[17]

By depicting the repetition of failure in Chow's relationships, the film introduces a relation to time associated with the drive. Though the passing of time changes the arrangement of events, repetition determines that their essence remains the same. Thus, we see the same scenes with different characters, the same dialogues with different partners, the same narration applied to different circumstances, and so on. These repetitions indicate that temporality, despite the newness and difference on the level of content that it brings, changes nothing essential for the subject. Time does not heal the wound of subjectivity itself. No amount of time can ameliorate the fundamental existential problem that the subject repetitively confronts—the tortured relation with its lost object.

TITULAR ATEMPORALITY

Wong Kar Wai registers the passing of time through the use of sporadic intertitles, and these intertitles provide a contrast with the visual

images in the film, which appear to defy temporality. The intertitles appear primarily in two different forms: they register the date (December 24 of four consecutive years, 1966–1969), or they indicate that a particular amount of time has elapsed (an hour later, ten hours later, and so on). Most films that use intertitles (or subtitles) to indicate the passing of time do so, obviously, because the amount of time that has passed is important for making sense of changes within the narrative. Oftentimes toward the end of a romantic comedy, an intertitle will note the passing of a long period of time (perhaps a year) in order to show how much the two characters have changed in this period of time (have they have grown apart, grown closer, matured, and so on). Or a thriller will use intertitles to register the time that the police investigation is taking in order to heighten the spectator's experience of suspense.[18] Whatever the case may be, the standard use of the intertitle marking the passing of time has a direct link to the temporality depicted in the images. The intertitle is present to help the spectator understand and interpret those images as fully ensconced in a temporality that defines them.[19]

The intertitles marking the passing of time in *2046* do not function in this way. Wong uses them so often in the film not in order to reveal the underlying temporality of what is happening visually, but in order to contrast the movement of time with the logic of the drive played out in the visual images. The intertitles highlight the extent to which things aren't changing. The point is not that the intertitles are deceptive, but that they are significant only as a point of contrast—not as a direct commentary on the visual images as they would be in most films.

The intertitles announcing Christmas Eve each year indicate that time is passing, but the visuals and the audio track that follow these intertitles give the lie to the idea that Chow is moving forward in some way. After each intertitle, we see Chow with a new woman—Lulu in 1966, Bai Ling in 1967, Wang Jing Wen in 1968, and Su Li Zhen (Gong Li) in 1969—but nothing really changes for him. In each case, he comforts a disappointed woman whom he treats as a substitute for the absent Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung). We see similar images of Chow dining at the same restaurant with the different women, and we hear the same portion of "The Christmas

Song" ("Chestnuts roasting on an open fire . . .") playing on the audio track. Though details change each year—sometimes we hear the song and other times we don't, for instance—the same drive underlies whatever we experience.

The decision to use intertitles to identify only the date of Christmas Eve each year is part of the fundamental irony of the film. As a holiday, Christmas Eve, even more than Christmas Day, embodies hopefulness, not only for Christians awaiting the commemoration of the birth of Christ but for anyone hoping to give or receive presents. On Christmas Eve, it seems that anything might be possible, that we don't know what surprises the next day will hold. But *2046* constantly shows that this hope for a surprising future is completely illusory. This is not to say that we always know what presents we'll receive or that we can predict every future event that will befall us, but rather that we know the future because we know that our relation to our lost object will not change and that we will not escape the drive that animates us. The intertitles of *2046* indicate hope and the promise of change; everything else in the film reveals the emptiness of that promise.[20]

The contrast between the temporality of the intertitles and the constancy within the film's visual images becomes most pronounced toward the end of the film when Chow attempts to rewrite his story entitled "2047," prompted by the critique of Wang Jing Wen (the daughter of the owner of Chow's hotel), who finds the ending too sad. The sequence begins with a shot of Chow holding his pen above the paper as if preparing to write. After an intertitle says "An hour later," the film cuts back to the same image: Chow's pen remains just above the paper and ready to write, but he isn't yet writing. The next intertitle proclaims the passing of ten hours, and we subsequently see Chow still hunched over his writing desk preparing to write. After another intertitle tells us that a hundred hours have gone by, the film returns again to the image of Chow unable to write at his desk.

By indicating the movement of time through the intertitles and contrasting this movement with the absence of movement in the visual image, Wong dissociates time from the form of subjectivity. Despite the passing of time, Chow remains in almost exactly the same position. The passing of time is typically indicated by movement

within the diegesis, but *2046* here deprives spectators of movement even as it registers time going by.[21] The film reveals that rather than existing as a temporal being, Chow exists as a being of the drive—continually sustaining a failed relation with his lost object. The series of failures that constitute his experience demonstrate the drive in action. In this scene, he is trying to write in a way that will address the desire of Wang Jing Wen, but he cannot come up with any adequate way of doing so. There is no possible respite from this failure because the failure is his mode of relating to his lost object and sustaining it as lost. Nothing that Chow writes will be right; nothing will heal the nonrelation existing between Wang Jing Wen and himself. Yet he feels driven to try and fail. The necessary status of the failure changes Chow's relationship to time. Though time surely continues to advance as it always does, Chow does not exist in a world of temporality, but in a world of the drive where the predominance of failed repetition renders temporality insignificant. The subject in *2046* is not a temporal entity. Though time passes for the subject, the subject remains locked in a certain relationship with eternity that defines it.

A MISSING VISUAL STYLE

Through his unique visual style, Wong Kar Wai makes clear formally the accessibility of the lost object that a spatial conception of eternity entails. Eternity is what doesn't fit in the temporal world, yet one can experience it. The lost object is genuinely lost, yet one continually encounters it. In order to convey this experience, Wong has to forge a visual style that defies an easy summary: it is at once parsimonious and excessive, reticent and garrulous. We see only a limited view of the filmic world, but we see it in bright and colorful images. This paradoxical style has the effect of displaying the subject's paradoxical relationship to the eternal, which is an infinite distance away but directly at hand.[22]

One scene toward the beginning of the film encapsulates the film's visual style. Chow has just returned to Hong Kong at the end of 1966 at the time of the riots. He is staying in a hotel and writing trashy articles in order to survive. In the middle of this experience, the film shows him talking on the hotel phone to his editor in a scene

that shows the film holding back and presenting excess at the same time. The camera is positioned on the hotel employee's side of a counter, and it looks down the hall to the rooms of the hotel. A single lightbulb hangs down in the foreground, and there is a phone on the right wall. The counter has an opening encased by wood where the hotel guest can reach through and pick up the phone. Above the wood casing is translucent glass. The wood and translucent glass obscure the head of the customer when she or he is talking on the phone, so one hears the conversation without seeing the facial expressions going along with it. The spectator can see part of the person's head through the glass but no definite features.

During the conversation with his editor, Chow describes a dancer at the club with large breasts who pleases the customers. He describes the dancer in dramatic and vulgar terms, and as he is speaking, we cannot see his face. It is as if the licentiousness that he recounts can be experienced only indirectly: not only do we not see the dancer herself, but we don't even see Chow's face as he talks about her. At this point, this scene testifies to the reticence of Wong's filmic style and the role of absence within it. But then (and without apparent provocation) Chow abruptly leans down to add, "Hang on. Of course I exaggerate. I can't say her tits are fake, can I?" When he moves from describing illusion (the large breasts) to what's behind the illusion (the faked status of the breasts), Chow's face becomes fully visible, and we can see his expression as he's speaking. As Chow describes the truth behind the illusion, we see his face emerge from behind the obscuring window frame. This suggests that the illusion—and illusions as such—do not hide an obscure mystery but something easily knowable and, in fact, already known. The film hides its secrets in plain sight and works to make the spectator aware of this.[23]

The design of the hotel set and the camera positioning initially suggests that the spectator will be able to see only Chow's torso while he's speaking on the phone. By restricting the spectator's view in this seemingly arbitrary way, Wong establishes absence within the visual field.[24] Whereas most films highlight the visibility and full presence of the filmic image, *2046* forces the spectator to experience the barrier to visibility and emphasizes what is not shown. Absence is central within almost all of the film's scenes. This has the effect of creating a

sublime point within the visual field, a point that takes on an elevated value due solely to its unavailability for the spectator.

The creation of absence within the visual field, especially an absence associated with an erotic content, produces a desire to see this point of absence or to have the absence made present. But rather than sustaining the absence in order to build desire, Wong almost immediately permits the realization of the desire. When Chow's face becomes visible in the image depicting him talking on the phone, we suddenly experience that there is nothing left to desire in terms of this scene. The style holds back and thereby suggests an absent plenitude, but it quickly reveals everything in order to subject the spectator to the disappointing experience of this plenitude.

Wong does this in order to forge a different kind of film spectatorship. Films typically structure spectator desire around the promise of fulfilling the desire that they arouse, either in terms of the visual field or in terms of the narrative. Mainstream films tend to attempt to keep this promise: *Ocean's Eleven* (Steven Soderbergh, (2001) ends with Danny Ocean (George Clooney) avenging himself on Terry Benedict (Andy Garcia) and winning back his estranged wife Tess (Julia Roberts), and *The Da Vinci Code* (Ron Howard, 2006) concludes with Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks) discovering the location of the Holy Grail. One could list an almost infinite number of related examples, but what these two illustrate is the link between absence in the visual field and in the narrative. Both *Ocean's Eleven* and *The Da Vinci Code* sustain an absence in the visual field—the spectator doesn't see the secret of the robbery plan in the former or the site of the Holy Grail in the latter—that corresponds to an absence in the narrative—its denouement (the actual robbery or the discovery of the Grail). When the desire for the missing element in the visual field is realized, the desire for filling the narrative absence is realized at the same time. In each case, the proper spectator watches the film awaiting the satisfaction that comes with desire's realization at the film's conclusion.[25]

Though mainstream filmmakers work almost by definition to temporarily sate desire and thus help to turn the spectator into a momentarily satisfied consumer, political or alternative filmmakers often seek either to sustain the spectator in a desiring position. For instance, filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami and Jim Jarmusch

show desire as essentially unrealizable. Kiarostami's *A Taste of Cherry* (1997) revolves around the efforts of Mr. Badii (Homayon Ershadi) to find someone to ensure that he has successfully killed himself, but the film concludes by leaving the spectator without any certain knowledge about Mr. Badii's ultimate fate. Jarmusch's *Broken Flowers* (2005) is structured around a father's search for a son that he didn't know he had, and the ending of the film leaves the son's identity—and even his existence—still in question. In these instances and numerous others, thwarting the fulfillment of the spectator's desire serves as a political act that testifies to a cinema outside the mainstream. By suggesting the unrealizability of desire, filmmakers try to create a mode of spectatorship divorced from and struggling against the logic of consumption. If the spectator grasps that desire remains inherently unfulfilled, then the commodity as such loses its magical appeal, and the spectator ceases to be identical with the consumer. This is the implicitly political dimension of Kiarostami and Jarmusch's filmmaking.

Wong does something different altogether. In both the structure of the visual field and the structure of the narrative, *2046* constitutes desires that it quickly fulfills in order to show that satisfaction does not lie in the direction of the fulfillment of our desires and that a different form of satisfaction is possible. The film conceals and then exposes what it conceals in a way that reveals the illusory nature of the value that is typically attached to what is concealed. Against both the illusory fulfillment offered by mainstream cinema and the unrealizable desire offered by many alternative filmmakers, Wong reveals the ultimate emptiness of fulfillment.

Enjoyment in *2046* is located not in the moments when the film permits spectators to realize their desire, but in the moments when this realization is held at a distance. For instance, we see Chow's sexual encounter with Bai Ling from the perspective of her neighboring hotel room, where we hear the noises of sex and see the wall shake to the rhythm of those noises. Or we see Chow talking with Wang Jing Wen about his writing while the corner of the wall obscures her presence in the image, creating the impression that Chow is talking to an absent figure. Or we see Chow talking with Su Li Zhen (Gong Li) in an over-the-shoulder shot that includes Chow's shoulder blocking

part of Su Li Zhen's mouth as she speaks. There are numerous other scenes like these throughout the film. In fact, the aesthetic construction of *2046* is organized around distance to such an extent that it becomes impossible to enumerate them.

In terms of his visual style, Wong attempts to create a new mode of spectatorship in which the spectator enjoys the presence of an absence. In *2046*, Wong forges an aesthetic of distance which allows us to reconceive the nature of beauty. The point is not that the appreciation of beauty requires distance in order to obscure the ugliness that proximity would reveal, but rather that the beauty exists in the distance from the object or in the barriers to it rather than in the object itself. To enjoy the visual style of *2046*, one must be able to appreciate what obscures one's vision—like the wooden window frame and the translucent glass by the hotel phone—and recognize how the film aestheticizes the restrictions that it erects. If we anticipate seeing what the various obstacles conceal, we miss the visual revolution that Wong is trying to enact. The film creates a beautiful concealment so that the spectator can escape the trap of searching for what appears to be concealed.

THE OTHER'S SECRET

As *2046* shows it, desire centers around the secret of the Other's desire, a secret that at first appears to be impenetrable. Each woman that Chow pursues, from the first Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung) to Wing Jing Wen to the second Su Li Zhen (Gong Li), harbors a desire that he cannot figure out. In each case, the secret of this desire serves as the provocation for Chow's own desire, and when he encounters Bai Ling, a woman whose desire seems self-evident to him, he cannot sustain any desire for her and simply treats her as a disposable source of sexual pleasure. The secret nourishes desire because it offers the subject hope for an ever-greater enjoyment on the horizon, although the desire that one knows provides no such promise.

Jacques Lacan famously says that "desire is the desire of the Other."[26] Commentators have interpreted this in many ways, and Lacan himself often played on the ambiguity in this statement (especially concerning how one might read "of"). But central to Lacan's

conception is the idea that desire finds its motivation not in what the subject knows about the Other, but in what it doesn't know. The subject's desire emerges out of its encounter with what it perceives as a blank spot in the Other. The subject desires because the Other appears to have a secret mode of enjoyment—what Lacan calls an objet petit a—that is inaccessible. Desire founds itself on the pursuit of the Other's secret, and the idea of such a secret sustains the Other's desirability for the subject. Without it, the Other becomes uninteresting—a quotidian object that cannot attract the subject's attention. An inability to access the Other's secret constitutes the subject as a desiring subject: even if a subject uncovers the secret of a particular other, the secret of *the* Other as such will remain necessarily out of reach. That is, there will always be another particular other who will occupy the position of the Other containing an unknown secret.[27]

The subject's status as a temporal being is correlative to its lack of access to the Other's secret. The subject struggles in time to arrive at the secret that recedes as the subject approaches it, and we experience temporality through this pursuit. To attain the Other's secret would be to arrive at eternity, a moment when desire would realize itself and the subject would finally be rid of the problem of desire once and for all. In *2046*, this link between gaining access to the Other's secret and gaining access to eternity becomes explicit.

The story of Chow's relationships and the images of the journey from 2046 constitute the entirety of *2046*, except for two brief digressions near the beginning and at the end of the film. The narration during these interludes recounts an ancient way of dealing with secrets that one wanted to protect. In the early interlude, the narrator says, "Before, when people had secrets they didn't want to share, they'd climb a mountain find a tree and carve a hole in it and whisper the secret into the hole then cover it over with mud. That way, nobody else would ever discover it. I once fell in love with someone. After a while, she wasn't there. I went to 2046. I thought she might be waiting for me there. But I couldn't find her. I can't stop wondering if she loved me or not. But I never found out. Maybe her answer was like a secret that no one else would ever know." While the narration recounts the practice of whispering secrets into a hole in a tree, the corresponding visual track metaphorically suggests this practice.

We see the image of a black hole in the center of the screen that looks like the center of a huge flower. A reddish brown flower shape opening out to the screen surrounds the black hole in the center, and a background of white, beige, and brown vertical stripes is visible at the edges of the screen. As Chow is speaking the narration, the camera pulls back from the black hole, and the film cuts to a shot that moves along a series of windows containing an illegible writing in blue neon. When he says "she wasn't there," the image returns to a long shot of the flower-like image, but this time a woman (who we will later learn is Wang Jing Wen) is facing the hole in the middle and whispering something into it. We see her only from behind, but the camera moves closer to her. As Chow says that he couldn't find her, the film cuts to a side view of the woman, a view that makes it more difficult to see her clearly. And when he says that he never found out whether she loved him, the film cuts to a shot of her face as she is speaking into the hole, though her hand covers her mouth so that we can't see it moving. The shot suggests that a secret that she is keeping from the man with her and from the spectator. The sequence concludes with a cut to a traveling shot of the blue neon writing just as Chow says that no one would know the secret. The speed of the traveling shot renders the writing illegible and the secret impenetrable.

This sequence suggests that the Other does in fact have a secret to impart, even as it indicates the barriers to discovering this secret. The film shows the woman whispering into the black hole just after the narration describes this as an ancient practice for hiding secrets that one does not want to ever reveal, which testifies to the existence of a secret in the first place. Later in the film, however, it becomes clear that the barriers to the secret—the black hole, the woman's act of whispering and covering her mouth—exist simply to hide the nature of the secret. In a sequence that repeats this earlier one, we see that the secret of the Other can be known but that knowledge of this secret always reveals its emptiness.

In a depiction of the train bound for 2046 toward the end of the film, we see the Japanese traveler repeat the story of telling one's secret to a hole in a tree to the android attendant on the train, who offers to be his tree. She makes the shape of a hole with her finger and thumb, but each time that the traveler tries to whisper his secret,

she moves her hand. Finally, he simply kisses her instead of telling his secret. After an intertitle notes that ten hours have passed, the traveler finally does reveal his secret to her. He says, "I have a secret to tell you. Leave with me." The android does not answer but turns away each time that he repeats this. Finally, we see the traveler tell his secret to the train captain, "I have a secret to tell you. Will you leave with me?" When he realizes that he will find no answer, he decides to give up his quest, and the film cuts to an external shot of the futuristic train moving in reverse.

Though most of the film shows Chow's concern with the secret of the Other, this scene reveals the nature of the secret through the traveler, who is Chow's stand-in here. The secret that he wants to tell is not a hidden piece of information or a feeling that he hasn't revealed to anyone else; instead, it is a question or a desire addressed to the Other. The interaction between the traveler and the android shows that the true secret of the Other is itself a desire—and thus it is alien even to the one who appears to guard it, which is why the secret cannot be revealed. The secret is not contained within the blank spot in the Other, but *is* this blank spot. That is, the hidden secret is just the Other's lack—its inability to attain the ultimate satisfaction that the subject posits in it. The spatialization of time in *2046* has the effect of revealing the secret of the Other's desire as a desire or a hole. We can't know it, not because it is hidden, but because there is nothing to know.

This becomes especially evident through the actors that Wong chooses to play the Japanese traveler and the android that he loves. Though the traveler appears to stand in for Chow in the story, the part is played not by Tony Leung (who plays Chow) but by Takuya Kimura, the same actor who plays the boyfriend of Wang Jing Wen, the hotel owner's daughter. What makes this choice especially significant is that Faye Wong, who plays Wang Jin Wen, also plays the android that the traveler loves. This becomes ironic when we recognize that the relationship between the traveler and the android fails, the film's narration explains, because the android loves someone else. Although it is true that Chow's relationship with Wang fails because she loves someone else, the person whom she loves is a character played by the same actor who plays the traveler, which means that

there should be no barrier to the relationship between the traveler (played by Takuya Kimura) and the android (played by Faye Wong). By choosing Takuya Kimura to play the part of the traveler and the boyfriend, Wong reveals that there is no ultimate barrier to realizing desire, but also that this realization does not bring the satisfaction that it promises, which is why we keep our distance from it.

The denouement of the relationship between Wang and her boyfriend further elucidates this fundamental idea in the film. Throughout the majority of the film, the hotel owner, Mr. Wang, prohibits the marriage of his daughter and her Japanese boyfriend. Due to his prejudice against the Japanese (which he attributes to the treatment of his family during the war), he cannot abide a Japanese mate for his daughter. This prejudice occasions loud arguments between Mr. Wang and his daughter and necessitates clandestine communication between her and her boyfriend with Chow functioning as an intermediary. But all at once, without any warning, Mr. Wang abandons his objections completely and permits the couple to marry. As is evident repeatedly in the film, a seemingly ineluctable barrier proves to be readily navigable. But as *2046* also makes clear, the ability to overcome the barrier separating us from the realization of our desire does not lead to the satisfaction that we believe it will.

Though Chow recognizes this in his own case (through the traveler in his story who pursues the android), he fails to translate this insight into his understanding of the Other. That is, he grasps his own status as a lacking, desiring subject—he grasps that his own secret is nothing but a desire for something he supposes the Other to have—but he cannot grant a similar status to the Other. The idea of a genuine secret in the Other is a barrier that continues to trip him up. Chow can't abandon this idea because abandoning it would involve simultaneously giving up the hope of complete satisfaction attached to eternity. After the traveler's interaction with the android, a few minutes later in the film, Chow comes to the realization that the android didn't answer because she loved someone else. He believes that her silence masked a genuine secret. But this belief represents another in a series of mistakes on the part of Chow, mistakes that the film puts on display for the spectator.

The film concludes by returning to the flower-like image with a dark hole in the center from the opening. Earlier, this hole seemed to be the site where one whispered one's secret to hide it from the world. We saw both the Japanese traveler and the android he loved whispering a secret into the black hole, which appeared to represent an impossible knowledge that neither other characters nor the spectator could ever discover. But the end of the film formally marks the change that has occurred. Whereas earlier the camera remained outside the black hole and seemed unable to penetrate its mystery, the film ends with the camera entering into it completely before the final credit sequence comes up.

When the camera enters into the black hole that metaphorically contains all the secrets of the Other, this cinematic gesture signifies that the mystery of the Other is not unknowable. But it does not mean that one can know the Other's secret in the way that one can know any quotidian fact. Knowledge of the Other's secret is the ultimate type of knowledge because it informs us that in the end there is nothing to know. The project of knowledge works to overcome ignorance and amass new information, but the final missing piece of information testifies to the painful truth that everything is already known. The visible barriers to knowledge hide the absence of a barrier, an absence that is traumatizing to anyone who recognizes it.

The narrative structure and visual style of *2046* create the unmistakable impression that the film's primary focus is the variety of barriers that make romantic love relationships impossible. The film spends a great deal of time addressing lovers who are no longer present, lovers who love someone else, and lovers who are simply off-limits for one reason or another. But in the end it allows the spectator to recognize that these limits do not represent the central difficulty for someone seeking love. We can always—at least potentially—find a way around empirical obstacles. In fact, these empirical obstacles serve to make love more appealing by concealing its true nature. *2046* begins with the empirical barriers to love not in order to reveal in the end an ontological barrier that we cannot escape, but in order to show that we can really have our love object. The realization of our desire in love is possible, but it is in no way desirable. By constituting the moment of desire's realization—the moment of eternity—as

a possible space, *2046* shows why love involves distance as much as it does proximity.

As long as we remain committed to an idea of eternity as a moment existing outside of time, we will continue to overestimate the satisfaction that it promises. The problem with Plato's conception of eternity is not the conception itself but the opposition he frames between eternity and time. Rather than criticizing the *Timaeus* for introducing eternity, we should call into question its introduction of time. Only by grasping the eternal as a spatial realm that we can inhabit do we have the opportunity to break the hold that the image of realizing our desire has on us. This is the political and existential project of *2046*. By creating a narrative and visual structure that spatializes not only time but also eternity, Wong Kar Wai allows the spectator to experience the mode of enjoyment that the film champions. If one enjoys *2046*, one must enjoy it in a new way—in a way that doesn't look forward to the ultimate fulfillment, but works diligently to keep that fulfillment at a distance.

Affirmation of the Lost Object

Peppermint Candy and the End of Progress

NATION WITHOUT HISTORY

The interconnection of individual development and the evolution of a nation has served as a subject for cinema since the birth of the feature film. From D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and Sergei Eisenstein's *The Old and the New* (1929) to Zhang Yimou's *To Live* (1994) and Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006), filmmakers have used the development of a particular individual or individuals as a way of telling the story of the nation to which the individual belongs. For D. W. Griffith, the trajectory from blissful peace to tragic suffering to radical awakening that Ben Cameron (Henry B. Walthall) undergoes mirrors the trajectory of the emergent united American nation. In a related way, Eisenstein's film follows the life of an ideal citizen Marfa (Marfa Lapkina), whose development occurs in conjunction with that of the emerging proletarian state. For Zhang Yimou, in contrast, the constancy of Fugui (Ge You) and his desire simply to survive enables the film to register the movement of Chinese history insofar as he remains the same throughout this movement. And Ken Loach's film reveals the violence that occurs with the founding of the Irish state through a depiction of the struggle between two brothers who end up on different sides of the historical conflict.

Birth of a Nation and *The Old and the New* aim at building support for what they see as a fledgling nation; *To Live* and *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* instead focus on the human cost involved in the development of a nation or national identity. Despite their vast differences, these four films—and the myriad others that adopt a similar structure—share an investment in the idea that national identity develops through history, that it is the product of a historical evolution that cinema can capture and even explicate through juxtaposition with the destiny of an individual or individuals.[1] National identity is in each case inextricable from the linear movement of time forward and the progress that occurs through this movement. Forward-moving time provides the arena in which the nation as such is able to emerge.[2]

Lee Chang-Dong's *Bakha satang* (*Peppermint Candy*, 2000) follows the structure of films such as these four insofar as it tells the story of South Korea's recent development from a military dictatorship to a modern capitalist democracy through the life of Yong-Ho (Sol Kyung-Gu). The film consists of seven sequences shown in reverse chronology, beginning in 1999 and ending in 1979, which chronicle the life of Yong-Ho leading up to his suicide in the opening sequence. Lee separates the sequences with single shots from the back of a train in which the film itself moves backward (so that in these shots the spectator sees people walking backward, smoke going back into a chimney, cars moving in reverse, and so on).[3]

Each major sequence begins with a title that indicates the place and time in which it occurs. The titles have the effect of making the film's reverse chronology self-evident and linking Yong-Ho's activities to particular moments within recent South Korean history. Yong-Ho's activities themselves and their trajectory through the different sequences also highlight this intersection.[4] With the focus on the intersection of Yong-Ho's personal history and Korean national history, the reverse chronology of *Peppermint Candy* would seem to indicate the intent of showing the development and ultimately the origin of contemporary Korean national identity. This narrative structure shows Korean history from the perspective of the present, which allows the spectator to view historical events while knowing what they portend. Beginning at the end confers a sense of teleology on the historical origin when the film finally arrives there.

But *Peppermint Candy* never arrives at an origin, and the film's reverse chronology undermines, rather than confirms, a teleology that leads to Korean national identity. As critic Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park puts it, "The film's reverse chronological narrative continually peels back into further reaches of Yong-ho's past in order to question the very teleological assumptions which insist that A must lead to B which will then lead to C and so on down the line."[5] The reverse chronology disrupts the spectator's relationship to chronological time in order to call into question the nation as an entity that evolves through history. As the film constructs it, nation is an entity defined by a continued flight from the trauma of sexual antagonism. This flight is not a development or a historical progression, but a constant movement that leads nowhere, despite its dependence on the illusion of progress. In short, Lee creates a film about the historical development of the Korean nation that reveals the absence of development.

Though the spectator sees how South Korea evolved from a repressive military dictatorship to an emerging democracy, the structure of the film subverts the idea of evolution. Instead of historical development, the film emphasizes the repetition of trauma, trauma that the nation attempts to escape and thereby exacerbates. Instead of images of progress, the film depicts a perpetual return to failure. The personal tragedy of Yong-Ho—his involvement in the Gwang-ju Massacre, his failed relation with Sun-Im (So-ri Moon), his disastrous marriage, and the like—operates as a synecdoche for that of the nation. The film's rejection of forward-moving time and progress is at once a rejection of the nation as a historical entity—or at least as a historical entity that could provide the subject with respite from the constitutive trauma of subjectivity itself. Nation, as the film conceives it, is the product of an investment in the idea of progress, the idea that the future will realize a national identity that always appears on the horizon. The struggle against nationalism becomes the struggle against the typical conception of temporality in which subjects are moving through time toward a novel future.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson links the emergence of the idea of nation to a shift in the experience of time. In the experience of time that makes nation possible, the clock synchronizes moments lived by disparate individuals and links these

moments—and the individuals living them—together. The temporal connection provides for the possibility of a national bond. As he puts it, "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history."[6] A forward-moving chronology marked by the calendar or the clock is essential for the phenomenon of nationalism to develop. Nations are born in retroactively definitive past events and collect a group of individuals around the image of a shared future. Without this type of chronology, national identity would not be able to forge a common purpose out of disparate desires. A nation is always an entity embarked on a progressive path toward the future.[7]

Disrupting the idea of the nation is not as easy, however, as turning away from a traditional forward-moving narrative chronology. In fact, Anderson insists that reverse chronology starting from the present—precisely the storytelling method of *Peppermint Candy*—provides the only viable way of telling a nation's story, in contrast to that of an individual, which can be told through a typical chronology. The barrier to this in the case of the nation's story is the absence of the definitive moment of birth that the individual has. According to Anderson, "Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography cannot be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time'—toward Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam."[8] Given the fundamental limitation with which national identity must struggle, a narrative utilizing reverse chronology is the nation's ideological counterpart to the individual's forward-moving biography. In both cases, time is inherently progressive, and the movement of time justifies the current order of things. The reverse chronology of *Peppermint Candy* appears to fit directly into the nationalist structure proposed by Anderson, in which movement backward in time serves to cement national identity in the way that a biographical story moving forward in time does for individual identity.

But Lee's film uses reverse chronology to different ends than justifying the present. Lee's film does not move backward in time in order to illustrate the successful progress of the South Korean nation;

instead, it does so in order to depict the reoccurrence of a failure or a failed reoccurrence and thus to undermine the spectator's attachment to nation as a foundation for identity. In each of the film's seven sequences, the spectator sees Yong-Ho endure some type of trauma linked to a trauma that the developing nation experiences at the same time, building up to the connection between Yong-Ho's break with Sun-Im coinciding with the Gwang-ju Massacre. By showing this series of traumas in reverse order in the way that he does, Lee makes clear not only that there is no progress, but also that the idea or ideal of progress renders these traumas unbearable rather than lessening their impact on the subject. Progress promises to deliver the subject from trauma by restoring a lost wholeness, by making it possible to overcome the experience of traumatic loss. But progress constantly defers the realization of its promise and thereby leaves the subject unequipped to bear the experience of trauma that it can't avoid.

PEPPERMINT CANDY AND LOST OBJECT

The idea of progress marks an attempt to overcome and deny the fundamental problem of subjectivity itself. The subject emerges as such through the act of detaching itself from an object that subsequently comes to orient the subject's desire insofar as it is lost. This lost object (or objet petit a) gains its constitutive power for the subject through the act of being lost and does not properly exist prior to be lost. The subject is born from a traumatic act of separation, and this structural trauma defines the subject throughout its existence. The lost object acts as an engine or cause of desire for the subject: it is only through this lost object that the subject is able to approach various other objects of desire. As long as the subject exists as a desiring being, it will continue to experience itself as traumatically detached from its lost object. Everyday objects—lovers, cars, books, jewelry—become desirable when they appear to embody the lost object, even though they never adequately do so. The subject spends its time pursuing objects of desire in search of the satisfaction that its lost object promises, but this is an unending pursuit. The failure of the object of desire to embody fully the lost object relegates the subject to perpetual failure and results in the

repetition of the drive always lying beneath the forward movement of desire.

It is this perpetual failure of the desiring subject that the idea of progress seeks to remedy. Even the most radical and thoughtful proponents of progress invest themselves in the belief that the subject can overcome its inherent incompletion and achieve some degree of stability relative to its object. This belief informs Marx's statement that "the bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of social production."[9] The self-limitation of subjectivity—the subject's inability to realize its desire and its consequent experience of trauma—appears obviated in this vision of a form of social production beyond capitalism.

For a pragmatist like Richard Rorty, who explicitly rejects the idea of progress leading to a human perfectability, a certain form of this idea nonetheless allows him to avoid the fundamental impasse of subjectivity. Rorty claims that "we see both intellectual and moral progress not as a matter of getting closer to the True or the Good or the Right, but as an increase in imaginative power."[10] Though increasing their "imaginative power" does not propel subjects toward Truth, it does, as Rorty's subsequent argument makes clear, lessen the dissatisfaction that inheres in subjectivity itself.[11] But the fact of the lost object's emergence through being lost undermines any idea of progress, even the most tenuous and hesitant. The reconciliation of the subject with its lost object cannot occur, and the closer the subject comes to the possibility of such a reconciliation, the more it withdraws. The relation between the subject and its object remains a structurally necessary failure.[12]

In response to the structurally necessary failure, the subject faces a fundamental decision. It can embrace the failure and recognize this failure as a form of success. Through this recognition, the failed effort to access the lost object becomes the successful repetition of encircling it. A change of perspective in this way has the ability to transform the subject's relation to the lost object. Rather than being an object that the subject seeks, it provides enjoyment for the subject through its very absence. Alternatively, the subject can abandon its pursuit of the lost object and seek out an identity that appears to provide the completion that the failed pursuit of the lost object does not.

This is what occurs in the case of nationalism. Nationalism appeals to subjects to the extent that it does because it promises full access to the lost object but at the price, ironically, of abandoning the pursuit of this object. That is to say, the subject exchanges the repetition of failure for the promise of success, but the nation never redeems this promise. Success or wholeness always appears on the horizon and is never achieved. In this sense, nation leaves the subject in the same position relative to its lost object, but the subject loses the ability to recognize the satisfaction derived from the failed encounter with it.

The title of Lee's film indicates its investment in the object most opposed to national identity. National identity, as the film conceives it, arises through its flight from and rejection of the lost object, which in this case is embodied by peppermint candy. Though peppermint candy is not Yong-Ho's lost object in the strict sense—he didn't emerge as a subject through pulling himself away from a jar of peppermint candy—it does serve as the representative of this object both for Yong-Ho and for the spectator.[13] The film establishes the privileged status of peppermint candy in almost every sequence, but it is in the final one (at the picnic in autumn of 1979) that we see the origin of its value for Yong-Ho, when Sun-Im gives him a piece of peppermint candy from the factory where she works. This is the first of the exchanges of peppermint candy, which are repeated throughout the film, up to the film's second sequence, in which Yong-Ho takes peppermint candy to Sun-Im on her death bed. Even though Yong-Ho attempts to embrace the object again in this sequence, he has already rejected it in favor of adhering himself to the idea of the nation and creating himself as a national subject, and as a result, the return to the lost object fails.

The foundational exchange of Yong-Ho's lost object for the prospect of national identity occurs in the film's penultimate sequence, just as Yong-Ho is being ordered away for the military action that results in the Gwang-ju Massacre. After the title announces "Military Visit—May 1980," we see Sun-Im attempt to visit Yong-Ho at the military base where he is stationed. The soldiers refuse to allow the visit because of the restrictions of martial law. Lee shoots the initial scene of this section in a way that emphasizes the distance between Sun-Im and the soldiers talking to her. The soldiers speak to Sun-Im

from within a small building, and they do not fully pay attention to her when she comes to the window. One continues to look through his paperwork, and the other continues to clean his gun. The position of the camera within the building creates a stark sense of separation: in this shot, Sun-Im exists for the soldiers and for the spectators only as a face in the window. Finally, the scene ends when one soldier receives a phone call that orders the mobilization of the unit for the suppression of a popular uprising (which would become the Gwang-ju Massacre). The soldiers quickly run off and leave Sun-Im behind without a word. The military action takes precedence over Sun-Im and her request.

In the scene that follows in the barracks, the mobilization leads directly to Yong-Ho's abandonment of his peppermint candy. The film shows soldiers rapidly assembling their gear for action with their superiors ordering them to move more quickly. Yong-Ho takes longer than the others, and a superior kicks him in order to speed him up. When Yong-Ho reaches for his box of peppermint candy to pack into his bag, the soldier kicks him a second time, again knocking him down. This kick causes the pieces of peppermint candy to be strewn across the barracks' floor, where Yong-Ho tries vainly to pick them up as other soldiers run over them. His efforts to salvage the peppermint candy earn him mockery and more kicks, and he decides to leave the candy behind on the floor in order to leave with the rest of his unit. As he runs out, the camera pans back to the peppermint candy, and we see the feet of two soldiers trample pieces of it. The violence directed toward Yong-Ho in this scene does not target simply his physical body, but also the embodiment of his lost object. Yong-Ho's attempt to keep the peppermint candy in the military barracks outrages the soldier who confronts him because this act represents a refusal to fully commit himself to Korean national identity.

By leaving the peppermint candy behind, however, Yong-Ho accomplishes just such a commitment. In this scene, he exchanges the representative of his lost object for the sense of identity that derives from nation as a collective investment. To become a national subject, one must sacrifice one's object for the identity and recognition that the nation provides.[14] The exchange appears outwardly advantageous

for the subject: whereas the privileged object embodies loss and thus provides only partial enjoyment, national identity promises completion and wholeness for the subject—a satisfaction without any sense of lack. But the nation does not exist; it is the product of nothing but the collective belief in it. The illusory status of national identity undermines the possibility of this total satisfaction, so that the subject who sacrifices its relation to the lost object on behalf of the nation ends up gravely disappointed, left with an invalid promissory note for an unattainable future at the expense of an experience of enjoyment in its actual partiality.

As Lee conceives it in *Peppermint Candy*, there is nothing more important than peppermint candy, but peppermint candy is not the perfect object of desire. It does not embody an ultimate and impossible enjoyment that Yong-Ho yearns for and can never access. Instead, it marks the inherent partiality of enjoyment through the way that it metaphorizes the relationship between Yong-Ho and Sun-Im. Peppermint candy represents the failure of their relationship rather than its success, the antagonism between them that is paradoxically the source of their bond. This reminder of failure is precisely what nationalism cannot tolerate. A nation is founded on the possibility of realizing through time a collective identity in which everyone and everything fits together properly.

A FAILED RELATIONSHIP

Because national identity requires the abandonment of the relation to the lost object, it institutes a structure of what Colette Soler calls "unisex." This structure demands that all its subjects orient themselves toward the promise of future fulfillment through the realization of national identity. As a result, there is no place for sexual difference. The modality of male subjectivity and its investment in the idea of completion predominates. Female subjectivity as such must be eliminated, though there is ample space for women who define themselves according to the male model. As Soler puts it, "Unisex is the regime of phallic jouissance, and all its forms are offered equally to all. It is not that women have been deprived of this jouissance, but for a long time and without exception, they could only encounter it

within the limits of their destinies as wives and mothers."[15] Though national identity includes actual women, it does not include female subjectivity as such—or its mode of enjoying. It rests on a masculinist foundation. This foundation appears most strikingly in *Peppermint Candy*, just after we see Yong-Ho abandon his privileged object in the barracks.

As Yong-Ho runs out of the barracks, urged on by his superiors, Lee follows him with a long hand-held traveling shot. We see him awkwardly running toward the wrong truck and then stumbling toward another one as a fellow soldier redirects him. The disorientation in this shot marks Yong-Ho's transition from his devotion to the privileged object (and Sun-Im) to his investment in national identity. When Lee cuts from this hand-held traveling shot, a sense of stability returns. The next shot shows Yong-Ho sitting in the back of a truck with his fellow soldiers. He is now able to secure his uniform and equipment in a much calmer environment. But the scene in the truck also reveals the masculinist nature of this environment. Within a few moments, a soldier notices Sun-Im walking, and catcalls immediately commence from all the soldiers except Yong-Ho. But their interest in Sun-Im is not actually an interest in Sun-Im. She serves as nothing but a catalyst for cementing the nationalist bond between them. This becomes clear as the scene transitions almost seamlessly from a group of soldiers yelling at a young woman to a group of soldiers proclaiming their fidelity to the national common cause.

The leader of the unit interrupts the catcalls by beginning an oath of bravery. A long shot of the inside of the truck shows all the soldiers moving their right arms across their body in unison as they pledge to sacrifice their blood for the sake of the nation. During this scene, Yong-Ho initially looks to his fellow soldiers in order to make sure that he is performing correctly. But in the end, he appears fully inserted into the identity that all the soldiers share. Lee cuts from a shot of the soldiers chanting in the truck to a shot of Sun-Im walking, though the chant continues on the audio track as the image changes. This shot (from the perspective of the truck) indicates that Yong-Ho and the film itself are moving away from Sun-Im. Yong-Ho opts for national identity, and this requires that Sun-Im be left behind walking on the dusty road. Lee cuts from Sun-Im walking to a close-up

of Yong-Ho's face, which registers his enthusiasm for the chant even as he looks back for a final glimpse of Sun-Im. The scene ends with another shot of Sun-Im walking to the sound of the soldiers chanting about their willingness to sacrifice everything for the nation. Here, the film illustrates the cost of national identity: it leaves the subject estranged from its desire.

The subject's inability to access its lost object leads it toward love as a solution to the problem of subjectivity. Through love, the subject seeks its lost object in the other, but the other never complements the subject and provides the missing object. As Lacan puts it in *Seminar VIII*, "There isn't any coincidence. What one lacks is not there hidden in the other. This is the whole problem of love."[16] Love represents an attempt to negotiate the impossibility of desire, but love relations replicate the problem of desire. Love can never overcome the noncoincidence of desire between the lovers, though subjects turn to love for the promise of a perfect reconciliation. Because of this noncoincidence of desire, subjects in love remain caught in the temporal loop of desire that continually circles back on itself. The time of love, as *Peppermint Candy* demonstrates, does not point toward the future.

Though Yong-Ho's relationship with Sun-Im has a privileged status (even over his relationship with his wife), *Peppermint Candy* never shows this relationship at a point where it appears to be working out successfully. We first see Yong-Ho bring peppermint candy to a dying Sun-Im in the hospital, but she has lost consciousness just prior to his arrival. The next image of their relationship occurs years earlier (later in the reverse chronology of the film) when Yong-Ho reaches his hand up the skirt of Hong-Ja (Kim Yeo-Jin) while on a date with Sun-Im. The subsequent sequence depicts the missed encounter at the military barracks. The film's final sequence does not show, as one might expect, the beginning of their love relationship. We see Yong-Ho and Sun-Im before they have really fallen in love, and the sequence focuses not so much on their love as Yong-Ho's alienation from their group of friends. *Peppermint Candy* excludes a successful moment in this central relationship in order to make clear that what Yong-Ho has lost through the course of progress is something that he never had.

Through the way that he shoots each of the interactions between Yong-Ho and Sun-Im, Lee emphasizes their inability to achieve a direct connection. The first missed encounter occurs when Sun-Im's husband tracks down Yong-Ho and asks him on behalf of Sun-Im to visit her in the hospital before she dies. While her husband was locating Yong-Ho and bringing him to the hospital, Sun-Im slips out of consciousness and thus misses the chance for a final meeting with her beloved. Yong-Ho nonetheless goes to her bedside and gives her the jar of peppermint candy that he bought for her, and he recounts its significance for them. In this medium shot, we see an unresponsive Sun-Im lying on her bed with a tube down her throat, while Yong-Ho leans over her and talks. When he walks away, however, the film cuts to a close-up of Sun-Im's face, and a tear comes out of her eye and falls down her face, indicating that she has understood Yong-Ho. By showing Yong-Ho walk away before showing Sun-Im's tear, Lee makes clear the lack of connection between them. Their interaction is necessarily unbalanced and one-sided; understanding on one side is not recognized on the other.

But the missed encounter is not a complete failure. It is the only form that the sexual relationship can take place. The question concerning this relationship is not whether the successful encounter occurs but how one comports oneself relative to the failed encounter. One might embrace the failure and the partial satisfaction that it offers by clinging to the lost object. This is what Yong-Ho attempts to do at the end of the film, but he cannot resist the nation's demand (manifested through the military) that he abandon this object.

Peppermint Candy seems to invite an interpretation that blames the South Korean nation and its violent development for the missed encounter between Yong-Ho and Sun-Im. Military rules prevent Sun-Im from visiting Yong-Ho, and then the order to squash the uprising, which leads to Yong-Ho's involvement in the Gwang-ju Massacre, further alienates him from her. But the film avoids a paranoid account that blames the nation while exculpating Yong-Ho (or the individual) through its account of the Gwang-Ju Massacre and Yong-Ho's specific role in the violence.[17] Not only does Yong-Ho participate in the violence massacre, but the film's depiction of his participation reveals a psychic investment in it that goes beyond the mere fact of a soldier following orders.

On the one hand, Lee shows Yong-Ho as a terrified young soldier uncertain of what to do in the face of the rebelling citizens and the military pressure to react with violence. We see leaders urging him forward into the conflict, and other soldiers gunning down fleeing civilians, while Yong-Ho doesn't appear to know what to do and is himself shot in the leg by a stray bullet. On the other hand, however, Yong-Ho first envisions the young woman who approaches him not as someone he doesn't know but as Sun-Im. Yong-Ho's image of the anonymous protester demonstrating against the nation is Sun-Im because to his mind she stands in opposition to the nation.[18] As Yong-Ho sits wounded on the ground, a young woman walks out of the darkness toward him in a long shot. It is Sun-Im, and a reverse shot of Yong-Ho reveals that this is how he sees the woman. He registers recognition on his face and even says her name. Subsequently, she appears as a young student who begs for him to let her go. Yong-Ho allows her to go home, but when a fellow soldier approaches, he begins to shoot, thinking that this is his duty. One of his stray shots hits and kills the young woman. Through this act, Yong-Ho punctuates the divide between Sun-Im and himself, and it reveals his culpability for this divide. Though the nation applies pressure on Yong-Ho, it is his own desire for the identity that nation provides that allows him to fully buckle under this pressure. The nation offers him respite from the missed encounter with Sun-Im—a missed encounter that marks their relationship from the beginning.

The ending of the film rejects any sentimentality or romanticism concerning the origin of Yong-Ho's subjectivity or the South Korean nation. We see the Honeycomb Club singing together in a circle while Yong-Ho walks away from the group and looks up at a train passing overhead. As the train comes, signified by the whistle in the audio track, the film concludes with a close-up on the face of Yong-Ho and finally a freeze frame on this image. Though this initial gathering of the Honeycomb Club provides the contrast for the reunion that begins the film, in which the alienation of Yong-Ho from the group is foregrounded, it does not highlight Yong-Ho's integration in the group or his connection with Sun-Im. Instead, the film ends with Yong-Ho drawn away from the group and from Sun-Im, drawn to the power of the train that seems at once to fascinate and to horrify him. By

refusing to end the film with the depiction of a connection to friends or to a lover that the development of the nation has ruptured, Lee makes clear that the loss that occurs during this development is the loss of nothing substantial.

As the South Korean nation develops and as Yong-Ho participates in that development, he does experience a series of traumatic ruptures, but in each case he loses what he doesn't have. That is to say, the accumulation of traumas that scar Yong-Ho's identity is his subjectivity; his subjectivity does not exist as a prior substance subjected to loss but emerges through the loss itself. The conclusion of the film reveals that Yong-Ho's alienation predates the series of traumas imposed on him by the nation. Like all subjects, he is originally out of synch with the social world to which he belongs and with the person he loves.[19] National identity and its attendant idea of progress provide an apparent answer to being out of synch, which is why Yong-Ho and so many others turn to it. Even prior to the arrival of the train in the final scene, Lee shows Yong-Ho drifting away from the group and not fitting in. Though it sustains his alienation from the group, the arrival of the train arrests Yong-Ho drift and allows him to focus on a clearly identifiable future. This is the fundamental appeal of national identity. It offers a cure for the problem of subjectivity, an illusory path toward an answer to the question that subjectivity poses.

DERAILING THE TRAIN

The appeal of the national idea depends on a conception of time moving forward toward a full realization of that idea. It is an inherently progressive idea, an idea inextricably tied to an investment in progress. The individual members of the nation experience a lack of collective identity in the present because this identity is a fantasmatic construction. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, "The national Cause is ultimately nothing but the way subjects of a given ethnic community organize their enjoyment through national myths."[20] These myths feed the enjoyment of a nation only insofar as they narrate the loss or theft of enjoyment. Paradoxically, one enjoys one's membership in a national identity through experiencing that identity as being threatened or lost. This is why nationalism never

simply affirms national identity but always involves a xenophobic attack on some group of outsiders that threaten this identity. One really experiences one's French identity, for instance, while lamenting the danger that Arab immigrants pose to it. There can be no end to such dangers as long as one wants to sustain one's national identity.

In *Peppermint Candy*, the threat to national identity comes from university students and the working class. The affirmation of national identity in the Gwang-ju Massacre functions through targeting student protesters and their working class allies as the threat to this identity. Earlier in the film, Yong-Ho solidifies his standing as a national subject as he tortures a union organizer while working as a police officer.[21] This incident occurs at a police station notorious for similar practices, and by setting the scene there, Lee suggests the role that the working class and its suppression has in the formation of national identity.[22]

National identity has a profoundly unfulfilled or uncertain status, and it must orient itself toward the future in order to create any stability. The future promises a South Korea rid of its discontented workers and students, a France without immigrants, a Germany rooted in blood and soil, and an America where everyone speaks English. Though the members of the nation cannot but experience national identity as currently under siege, they can look forward to the time when the lack will be filled and the collective identity will be complete. The future provides a milieu in which the barriers to the nation's self-identity will have been transcended.

In this sense, the national idea shares in the chronology of the cinema and the train. Both the cinema and the railroad work to install a mode of temporality focused on movement toward the future. In this mode of temporality, time exists as a rational standard that provides an order for rigidly structuring social relations. As Mary Ann Doane puts it in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, "This rationalization of time found its fullest realization in a world standardization that took its impetus from the development of railway travel and telegraphy. The standardization of time was originally effected by the railway companies themselves, which found it extraordinarily difficult to maintain comprehensible schedules in the face of scores of differing local times."[23]

Against the background of the standardization of time ushered in by the railroad, the cinema emerges.

Even where it challenges the perfect rationality of time through depictions of contingent events (as in the actualities of the Lumière brothers), cinema nonetheless affirms the conceptualization of time as nonstop forward motion toward the future. Doane adds, "The film, driven by a machine, moves inexorably forward, demonstrating the inevitable nature of irreversibility. . . . This basic commitment to the irreversibility of movement subtends and supports all the various experimentations with narrative temporality that punctuate the history of cinema. It is this basic commitment which impresses the spectator with the inexorably forward movement of film, with the 'truth' of irreversibility."[24] Interruptions in the forward movement of the train and cinema are contingent—for instance, the breakdown of an engine or a projector—but these interruptions cannot serve to call into question the conception of time that the train and the cinema help to institute. The train and the cinema betray a formal investment in progress and work to install progress as an unsurpassable horizon for the subjects who submit to their parallel regimes.[25]

The train plays a central role in *Peppermint Candy*. Yong-Ho opts to kill himself by standing in front of a train, and Lee uses a series of shots from the back of a train projected in reverse as the transition device between each of the film's seven sequences. What's more, the film's credits are shown over a long traveling shot from the front of a train moving through a dark tunnel. The opening shot of the first sequence, entitled "Outdoor Excursion—Spring 1999," depicts a train passing over a bridge. The camera then pans down to the ground beneath where Yong-Ho is lying on the ground. From the initial long shot, he appears dead, as if the train had run over and killed him. The subsequent panning close-up across his body reveals that he is breathing, but full of despair. Nonetheless, the scene emphasizes the violence of the train occurring through its incessant forward movement. Yong-Ho gets up and walks to the picnic of the Honeycomb Club, the event that marks the beginning and end of the film. This repeated event takes place both times at the Twin Railroad Bridge, in the shadow of passing trains. The train figures so significantly in the

film because of its link with the forward movement of time, with the idea of progress, and with the cinematic apparatus itself.

Peppermint Candy attempts to counter the power of the train and the logic that this technology entails. Whereas the train helps to install a temporality of nonstop forward motion, the film reveals the repression involved with this motion. An investment in the forward motion of time demands a repression of failure, and the film attempts to affirm failure through its formal structure. The link between the cinema and the train is central to the formal structure of *Peppermint Candy*. The film defies the forward movement of the cinematic apparatus and of traditional cinematic narrative by moving backward in time, and it uses the reverse-projected shots from the train as its sole recurring motif in order to call into question the train's seemingly inevitable motion forward.[26]

By structuring the film in reverse order and prominently using the reversed shots from the train, Lee constructs an aesthetic that interrupts two of the most powerful images of progressive movement in modern society. Of course, in order to do this, he must use the cinema and the railroad, which requires some degree of investment in their formal structure. But he uses the technologies against themselves. In *Peppermint Candy*, one sees not only the capacity of the cinema and the railroad for violently imposing the idea of progress, but also their ability to undergo an aesthetic transformation that changes their historical valence. The shot from the back of the train projected in reverse changes the nature of the train itself. It allows the spectator to see what has been left behind in the movement forward and to focus on objects that one would typically ignore. In this sense, the train works against itself within *Peppermint Candy*. Likewise, the reverse chronology of the film as a whole transforms cinematic spectatorship into a confrontation with a repeated traumatic failure rather than a submission to a progressive movement toward wholeness.

VIOLATING THE RULES OF ATTRACTION

The coming-of-age teen or college film seems quite far removed from films about national identity. But what both share is an intimate link to the idea of progressive movement toward wholeness.

Just as the nation must grow and progress temporally in films about the nation, teens and college students must mature during coming-of-age films. These films chronicle the transformation to adulthood, and in order to do so, they must emphasize the temporality of the events that they recount. Nowhere is this more evident than in the *American Pie* sequence—*American Pie* (Paul Weitz, 1999), *American Pie 2* (J. B. Rogers, 2001), and *American Wedding* (Jesse Dylan, 2003). Within each film and through the course of the three films as a whole, the characters undergo a maturation process directly linked to their experience of time, while they also constantly feel the passing time pressuring them to live that time to the fullest. The conceits that dominate each film involve obtaining the requisite experiences of life before time runs out. In the first film, for instance, four friends pledge to lose their virginity before graduation because they believe that not doing so will indicate a failure to live their high school years fully enough. The result of the temporal projects is always a more mature subject, even when the project is as mundane as that of losing one's virginity or having the greatest party ever. One maximizes time, and one becomes an adult.[27] Though these projects might seem at odds with each other, the typical coming-of-age film reconciles them, and that is why time and its thematization plays such a central role in almost every film of this genre.

The exception is Roger Avary's *Rules of Attraction* (2002), which uses the atemporal mode to counter the coming-of-age film just as Lee Chang-Dong uses it to lay out an alternative to the national film.[28] Like *Peppermint Candy*, *Rules of Attraction* begins with the chronological end—the "End of the World" party meant to celebrate the upcoming conclusion of the college experience for graduating seniors. At this party, the film introduces us to the three principal characters and the problem that defines each of them: Lauren Hynde (Shannyn Sossamon) is trying to lose her virginity with the right person; Paul Denton (Ian Somerhalder) searches for a homosexual partner among avowedly heterosexual guys; and Sean Bateman (James Van Der Beek) loves Lauren but continues to make do with substitutes. Though it opens the film, the "End of the World" party marks the end of the college development of these three characters, and as the party unfolds, we see that they have come to a point of failure. After

deciding to lose her virginity with a film student instead of her dream guy, Lauren finds herself being raped by a townie while the film student films the act. The heterosexual guy whom Paul tries to kiss beats Paul and throws him out of his bedroom. Sean ends up lying about his identity and sleeping with an anonymous young woman while wishing that she was Lauren.

Because the failures of the three principal characters occur at the end of the chronological time depicted in the film, the spectator cannot watch the film hoping for a movement from failure to success through time. Avary begins with a series of failures, but he places these failures at the temporal end of the film's story in order to make clear that we can expect no progress beyond them. After the depiction of each initial failure at the party, Avary employs extended scenes in which the film runs backward. Though similar moments occur in *Peppermint Candy* and *Memento*, *Rules of Attraction* devotes more of its running time to the backward depiction of events than either of the other films.[29] In the opening sequence of the film that introduces the three central characters, after we see an event occur in forward moving time, Avary repeats the scene by showing the same event occurring in backward-moving time, as if he were rewinding the film. These reversals of the film point to the direction that the film will take. Rather than moving on to the future where the characters might escape their failures in adulthood, it will delve into the past where we will discover that the failures of the "End of the World" party are simply the repetitions of a series of the same failures for each character.

The temporality of *Rules of Attraction* after the initial party is ambiguous. Though the events depicted later in the film occur before the concluding party and do lead up to the party, they seem to take place outside of the movement of time. No one in the film makes statements that refer to time or to time passing, and the film doesn't register any development in the characters. Instead, we see the characters act in ways that they will repeat at the "End of the World" party. Lauren pines after Victor (Kip Pardue), who doesn't even know who she is; Paul gets heterosexual men alone and then finds his advances rejected by them; and Sean dreams of Lauren while having sex with other women, including her roommate, whom he

visualizes as Lauren during the sex act. Because the film begins with the repetition of these various failures, we know that Lauren will not win Victor's affection, nor will Paul finally convince his object to accept him, nor will Sean change Lauren's attitude toward him.[30] As spectators, we cannot adopt the progressive outlook that the coming-of-age film typically demands. At the same time, the film deprives us of the nostalgia for the college years that also tends to be present in this genre. Not only will the characters not find the object that would allow them to realize their desire, but they cannot even take refuge in the belief that they once had it and subsequently lost it. In this way, *Rules of Attraction* authors the same critique as that of *Peppermint Candy*. The genres are different, but the narrative demands of the genres that both films must challenge are the same.

NOSTALGIA'S INABILITY TO REMEMBER

If *Peppermint Candy* indicts Yong-Ho for his lack of fealty to the lost object, it is even more unsparing in its critique of the Honeycomb Club, a group of friends enjoying a 20-year reunion at the beginning of the film and having a picnic at the same spot at the end of the film. The Honeycomb Club stands in for the average subject in Korean society. Despite their working-class origins, the members of the club appear moderately successful—they include, for instance, the wife of a bus company executive—and they have an ability to sustain their devotion to pleasure even when Yong-Ho crashes the reunion and begins acting crazily. This commitment to pleasure and ability to ignore potentially traumatic disturbance—even a man killing himself on a railroad bridge—defines the average form of contemporary subjectivity. In fact, the beginning of the film even encourages spectators to locate their allegiance with the Honeycomb Club, as it depicts Yong-Ho engaging in what appear to be nonsensical and comedic antics. Because spectators do not know what lies behind Yong-Ho's outburst in the opening scene, the film implicitly prompts sympathy with the crowd looking down on him. But the film subsequently reveals the indifference of the Honeycomb Club to suffering and thereby shifts all sympathy away from them. The members of

this club have gathered together to commemorate the past, but they exist without any cognizance of it.

The fact of the reunion itself indicates an inability to remember any experiences of trauma on the part of the Honeycomb Club. It marks the twenty-year anniversary of the original picnic at which the group of friends first got together, but no one in the group brings to mind any of the traumatic events that have shaped the nation since then. One attends a reunion in order to experience a nostalgic relationship to the past rather than to remember or experience again its traumas. This group originally included Yong-Ho (and he attended a similar picnic twenty years earlier), but no one invited him to the reunion. His current absence is constitutive for the group's pleasure because he represents the series of national traumas that the group cannot acknowledge. The group's lack of awareness of the traumatic history that sustains their position and their repression of that history bears some degree of culpability for the state in which Yong-Ho finds himself.

The spectator doesn't learn all the details about the Honeycomb Club until the second sequence, entitled "The Camera—3 Days Earlier, Spring 1999." This sequence provides background information on the club through a radio broadcast that Yong-Ho is listening to in his car. During a series of overlapping shots showing Yong-Ho's hands on the steering wheel and the windshield of the car, an interview on the car radio informs the spectator that the Honeycomb Club is planning a twenty-year reunion of its first picnic on the upcoming Saturday at the Twin Railroad Bridge. By delaying the spectator's access to this information, Lee creates a more alienating initial scene and also works to characterize Yong-Ho as the element that doesn't fit in this scene.

The members of the Honeycomb Club are national subjects whose status depends on forgetting the trauma involved in the construction of a national identity. While Yong-Ho flees from the failed encounter with the lost object to national identity's promise of success, the members of the Honeycomb Club are so invested in a national identity that they have lost all memory of an encounter with the lost object. This is why Yong-Ho's presence at the picnic is so disturbing.[31]

In the film's opening scene, Yong-Ho appears as a disruption—a stain in the image of group pleasure. After beginning with the image of him lying beneath the railroad bridge, the film follows a staggering Yong-Ho as he walks toward the picnic occurring along the shore of the river. The people at the picnic are dancing, drinking, listening to music, and generally enjoying themselves. Yong-Ho walks awkwardly into the middle of the people dancing and bumps into two of them. He becomes the center of attention, and someone from the group recognizes him.

When the club members recognize their old friend Yong-Ho, the president of the group proceeds to apology repeatedly to Yong-Ho for not inviting him to the reunion. The controlling logic of the group plays itself out in this gesture. The excessive apologies have the effect emphasizing that the omission was not simply logistical (as the president claims), but linked to the group's unconscious. By apologizing too much, the president implicitly proclaims his desire to exclude Yong-Ho and lays bare the guilt he feels for this desire. As the actual presence of Yong-Ho at the picnic reveals, he is incompatible with the smooth functioning of the Honeycomb Club.

After enduring the apologies of the president, Yong-Ho steps up to sing a karaoke song. During this song, the split between him and his former friends becomes obvious and impossible to cover up. He sings about being forgotten and left behind, and then stops singing and simply begins to scream, to throw himself around wildly, and finally to run into the river. He runs down the river screaming until he reaches the railroad bridge, where he climbs up and ultimately kills himself. Lee depicts Yong-Ho's breakdown in this scene in clear contrast to the actions of Honeycomb Club. From the moment that Yong-Ho begins to act strangely, the club works to minimize the disruptiveness. When his song becomes troublesome, someone quickly moves to sing in his place. When he runs into the river screaming, they tell each other to ignore him.

Yong-Ho's extreme behavior in this scene has the effect of alienating the spectator from him and aligning the spectator with the Honeycomb Club. His screaming tirade in the river seems like the indication of mental imbalance because one views this scene without any knowledge of the events leading up to it. But the conclusion of

the scene pulls the spectator away from the Honeycomb Club and to Yong-Ho. After depicting Yong-Ho standing isolated in the river, the film cuts back to the Honeycomb Club continuing the picnic. We first see Yong-Ho walking on the railroad bridge in a long shot that shows the Honeycomb Club drinking and talking under a tent in the foreground. Yong-Ho emerges barely visible in the deep background from the left side of the image as he walks across the bridge. As he screams again, a woman from the group stands up and notices him. She wonders aloud what they should do about him, but the consensus of the group is that he should be ignored.

When it becomes apparent that Yong-Ho is intent on killing himself by standing in front of an oncoming train, the group reacts by starting the music and dancing rather than rushing to his aid. One member of the group walks to the railroad and begs him to come down, but the group as a whole parades its lack of concern. The long shots of the group with the small figure of Yong-Ho in the background on the railroad bridge reveal his significance in their eyes. The final image of the group shows them frantically dancing, and the cut to Yong-Ho ready to kill himself on the bridge indicates what they are attempting to avoid. Their identity depends on paying no attention to Yong-Ho and the trauma that he embodies.

By playing out the contrast between the Honeycomb Club and Yong-Ho in this way, *Peppermint Candy* initially aligns the spectator with the Honeycomb Club and then radically shifts this alignment away from them and toward Yong-Ho. The Honeycomb Club is a group organized around nostalgia for the past, which is simply the reverse side of hope for the future. By turning the spectator away from this group and toward the traumatic past at the end of the opening scene, the film indicates its attitude toward time. Time does not lead from a past wholeness to a future wholeness but installs the subject in an unending repetition of failure. The film's narrative structure moves in reverse in order to underline the idea that time is going nowhere.

GOING BACK

Yong-Ho's dying statement proclaims his desire to go back, and structurally this statement leads into the reverse movement of the

narrative. But the statement also has a political resonance for the film. Yong-Ho's desire to go back is at once the film's desire to reject the idea of progress essential to the development of the nation. In place of progress, the film advocates going back to the failed encounter with the lost object and the repetition of this failure. Through its formal and thematic structure, *Peppermint Candy* fully embraces the idea of going back expressed by Yong-Ho at the close of the film's first sequence. But the way that it theorizes going back cuts against the usual understanding of this process.

When people proclaim on their deathbed that they want to go back, we tend to associate such statements with regret concerning the choices that they have made or with a desire to return to the relative innocence of their youth. Going back would offer them a chance to change their mistakes and make different decisions or to live again in the world prior to those mistakes being made. But for *Peppermint Candy*, going back does not involve changing the past or returning to it so much as rejecting the forward moving temporality that renders the subject unable to experience its failed relation to its object as a form of success. The problem that confronts Yong-Ho at the beginning of the film is not that of past mistakes but of an investment in the forward-moving chronology of the nation and its ideal of progress. The film depicts no time of primordial innocence of happiness that Yong-Ho subsequently lost. Instead, it shows his continuing alienation from the failed and traumatic relation to the object that defines subjectivity. In this light, going back involves returning to the interminable failure itself and refusing to leave it. It is only by inhabiting the failure of its relation to the lost object that the subject has any possibility for experiencing the partial satisfaction that the lost object provides rather than longing for an impossible completion.

Inhabiting failure requires a different relationship to time than that offered by traditional cinematic form. Of course, not every film that adopts this relationship to time must take up the reverse chronology of *Peppermint Candy*. Though *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002), and *Peppermint Candy* demonstrate that this formal device is not a hapax or a completely singular phenomenon, it is not a magical solution for the problem

of the cinema's complicity with a progressive temporality. Though it doesn't necessitate reverse chronology (on the screen or in one's existence), the relationship to time that *Peppermint Candy* exemplifies does require a disinvestment in the promise of the future. Subjects succumb to the lure of nationalism only to the extent that they succumb to the lure of the promise of the future.

With *Peppermint Candy*, Lee Yang-Dong creates a work of explicitly national cinema designed to not just lay bare the illusions of nation and national identity, but to also break with the conception of temporality that serves as the foundation for national identity. In this sense, it breaks not only from films like *Birth of a Nation* that ideologically affirm an idea of national identity, but also from films like *To Live* that show the costs that this identity requires. Insofar as it is attached to the nation, national cinema, regardless of whether it is critical of the nation, whether it affirms the nation in order to challenge colonialism, or whether it does so in order to support the colonialist enterprise, almost inherently invests itself in the idea of historical development and progress. By using the cinema against itself in order to subvert its inherently progressive tendencies, Lee elaborates a new form of national cinema in which the nation ceases to be the solution to the problem of subjectivity and becomes nothing but a false promise.

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The Temporal Flight from Trauma

Irréversible and the Critique of Experience

THE PRIORITY OF EXPERIENCE

Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002) bombards spectators with the immediacy of traumatic experience. At the time of its opening, it occasioned critical derision and prompted audience members to walk out at Cannes because of its unrelenting assault on the senses. J. Hoberman's famously negative review in the *Village Voice* contends that the film indulges in "intentionally and successfully repellent nastiness" for no other point than nastiness itself.[1] In a review tellingly subtitled "Gaspar Noé's Cinematic Rape," David Edelstein claims that *Irréversible* "wants to violate you in the most lasting ways imaginable."[2] Even to this day, screenings of the film give rise to outcries and denunciations for the uncomfortable nature of the images it presents and the disturbing way that it presents them.[3] It is almost impossible to imagine teaching the film in a college classroom, and I know of no one who has even considered doing so. Not only does the film contain graphic images—the lengthy depiction of a brutal killing and a nine-minute rape scene—but the film's form serves to augment this disturbing content. In fact, the excessive presentation of the violence in *Irréversible* brings it almost to the level of exploitation cinema, in which violence occurs just for purposes of titillation.

What appears to save *Irréversible* from the status of a pure exploitation film is the sheer length of the violent scenes. Most violent exploitation films, in the manner of Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (2007), eroticize the violence that they depict through the use of an editing strategy that allows spectators to enjoy the violence without being disturbed by its ramifications. Noé edits the content of an exploitation film with editing more appropriate to an Italian Neorealist film (though, to be sure, with camera movements that Vittorio de Sica never employed). Rather than showing violence through a series of rapid cuts designed to render it more spectacular, he uses exclusively long takes that make it impossible to find enjoyment in the violence. Noé himself notes in an interview with David Sterritt that he aims to produce violence that is not "what we usually see in a fiction movie."[4] But it is not just the way that Noé films violence that separates it from most cinematic violence; it stands out because the film prompts spectators to view the violence in a mistaken light.

Though *Irréversible* contains graphic depictions of violence that make it a difficult film to watch, it does not allow spectators to understand the violent events properly as they are taking place, and it thematizes this misunderstanding. This makes it like *Memento* (Christoper Nolan, 2000) and *Peppermint Candy* (Lee Chang-Dong, 2000), which also use reverse chronology to mislead spectators and consequently to expose the relationship between misunderstanding and temporality. In these three films, the reverse chronology produces a necessary misreading of what one sees. This misreading is written into the filmic text itself, so that if a particular spectator avoids it and somehow reads the scenes correctly, this would actually represent the ultimate error—a misreading of the misreading.

In the case of *Irréversible*, Noé distorts temporality and constructs a reverse chronology in order to make clear that it is only in separating ourselves from temporality that we can understand and appreciate the traumatic nature of our existence. Temporality, as Noé's film conceives it, skews our relationship to trauma and blinds us to trauma's inherent inescapability. The belief that trauma can be overcome makes impossible any reconciliation with trauma, and this belief derives from an investment in the idea of forward-moving time. By breaking with forward-moving time through the form of *Irréversible*, Noé attempts

to promulgate a similar break in the spectator. The proper spectator of the film leaves the cinema with a changed relation to time and, consequently, a changed relation to trauma.

The structure of the film allows spectators to experience events in a false immediacy and subsequently see the layers of mediation that inform them. Each of the twelve scenes that make up the film involves just a single shot—or multiple shots in which the cuts are disguised to create the impression of a single shot, as in Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948).[5] The film begins at the end of the story (or fabula) it presents with the entrance of Marcus (Vincent Cassel) and Pierre (Albert Dupontel) in the gay sex club Le Rectum on a quest to kill La Tenia (Jo Prestia) for his rape of Alex (Monica Bellucci). This scene concludes with Pierre's violent killing of a man who is raping Marcus in the club. At this point, the spectator wrongly assumes that Pierre kills the man that he and Marcus were seeking, but his victim is not the man who earlier (or later in the filmic discourse) rapes Alex.[6] The film then recounts in reverse chronology the reactions to the rape, the rape itself, the party that Marcus and Alex attended with Pierre before the rape, Alex and Marcus at home getting ready for the party, and finally Alex reading a book while lying on the ground at a park.

The movement backward in time in the film extends the trauma of the catastrophic events over the entire structure of the film. Violent death and rape are obviously traumatic events in themselves. Anyone forced to watch these events in the drawn-out way that Noé presents them would recognize their traumatic nature. But *Irréversible* doesn't just subject its audience to an immediate experience of the traumatic event. Instead, it connects the traumatic event to the everyday lives of the characters and thereby shows how trauma informs quotidian existence as much as it does the catastrophic event itself. There is no moment of happiness that exists apart from traumatic loss. The belief in the exceptional—that is, nontraumatic—status of such moments dilutes the poignancy of these moments themselves and at the same time disfigures the traumatic event for the subject experiencing it.

In this sense, *Irréversible* repeats the task of Alain Resnais's documentary *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955), a film that attempts to link the events of the Holocaust to European daily life in 1955. To create this effect visually, Resnais cuts between documentary footage

of the death camps just after the war and current images of the same area. The film's narrator also makes this connection. He says, "*nous qui feignons de croire que tout cela aille dans un seul temps, et qui ne pensons pas à regarder autour de nous, et qui n'entendons pas un cri sans fin*" ["we pretend it all happened only once, at a given time and place. We turn a blind eye to what surrounds us, and a deaf ear to humanity's never-ending cry."] For Resnais, the key to appreciating the trauma of the Holocaust does not lie in sustaining the memory of it—the oft-heard mantra, "Never forget"—but in not viewing it as a temporal event at all. Instead, one must be able to see how the trauma that it embodies remains always close at hand, even in moments of serenity and peace (as represented by the pastoral contemporary shots of the death camps in *Night and Fog*).

A similar structure is at work in another atemporal film—Greg Marcks's *11:14* (2003). This film depicts two traumatic events occurring exactly at 11:14 p.m.: a dead body falls onto the roof of a car driving down the highway, and a van crashes into a young woman and kills her. These two events occur early in projection time of the film, and they appear as immediate acts of inexplicable violence. They shock both the drivers of the vehicles and the spectator, who is located within the vehicles before and during the traumatic events. One experiences these collisions as instances of overwhelming immediacy: there is no warning, and they put a violent stop to the preceding activity. After presenting these two events and their aftermath early in the film, Marcks moves earlier in diegetic time and provides the background for the two deaths.

The depiction of the prelude to the two traumatic events has the effect of not only exposing the cause of the trauma, but also extending the trauma beyond the isolated events themselves. The film reveals a web of criminality and cover-ups perpetuated by ordinary subjects that precipitates the two collisions. Cheri (Rachael Leigh Cook) fakes a pregnancy in order to con two different boyfriends into giving her money for an abortion, money that she will use to run away with a third. One of the boyfriends, Duffy (Shawn Hatosy), robs a convenience store and shoots his friend in the process in order to get the money; another is killed when a gravestone falls on his head during sex with Cheri. After she abandons him, her father (Patrick Swayze),

assuming that she has murdered him, tries to dispose of the body to hide the evidence. By presenting the traumatic events themselves before this background to them, *11:14*, like *Irréversible*, initially bombards the spectator with an experience of apparently unmediated trauma and then subsequently provides the mediation.[7] By doing so, both films work to change our conception of trauma.

Caught up in the belief that trauma is confined to the specific traumatic event and that moments of happiness can exist outside the stain of trauma, traumatic events appear in the way that they do in *Irréversible*—as irruptions of shocking violence that appear to have no antecedent or cause. But the structure of the film reveals the mediation that informs these irruptions, which has the effect of broadening the trauma rather than ameliorating it. Because *Irréversible* begins with the traumatic end of its story and then moves backward in time, it forces spectators to view the subsequent events of the filmic discourse against the background of this opening trauma. Earlier moments within the diegetic time presage the trauma of the opening scene and the rape of Alex. There is no time in the film that exists beyond the impact of the traumatic event. This broadening also changes the context of the traumatic event. By permitting spectators to see trauma not as an isolated phenomenon but as constitutive of our existence, the film creates the possibility for experiencing trauma differently—namely, as something inherent in all moments of existence rather than just the overtly traumatic ones.[8]

WHAT WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

The key to *Irréversible* resides in the errors of judgment that it induces in the spectator. Because we do not see what happens earlier in the diegetic time, we misunderstand the nature of what we see in the film when we see it. The film subsequently corrects our judgment by uncovering the mediating structure surrounding the key events. In light of our later knowledge, the traumatic events take on a new coloring and the nature of the trauma undergoes a substantial shift. In this way, the film shows that properly locating the traumatic event requires moving beyond the immediacy of the event itself and its violent spectacle; one must view the event through its relationship

to the situation in which it appears. As the film makes clear, the immediacy of the traumatic event is always misleading and always a barrier to grasping the event. Privileging the immediate experience of trauma—either witnessing it or experiencing it—becomes a way of avoiding it.[9]

In order to show the errors of immediate experience, the film begins with it. The second scene of the film shows Marcus and Pierre entering Le Rectum in search of a man named "La Tenia" (whom we will later learn is the man who raped Alex). The film depicts their search through the club with disorienting camera movements that never allow the spectator to establish a sense of spatiotemporal orientation. Much of the scene occurs in near-total darkness, and the moments of light usually reveal pockets of sexual activity. These fragmented glimpses of sex don't allow us to comprehend fully what's going on and thus free us to envision the most extreme behavior that we can imagine. The scene works to obscure the geography of Le Rectum, though it is clear that Marcus and Pierre are moving downward as they continue on their search. When they find a man who refuses to answer whether he is La Tenia, Marcus begins to assault him, even though this is not, as the spectator will discover later, the rapist. This soon leads to the man gaining the upper hand in the struggle and beginning to rape Marcus. Finally, the scene concludes with a long depiction of Pierre repeatedly smashing the man's head with a fire extinguisher.

When viewing this scene the first time, it seems that Pierre and Marcus are close friends and that Pierre kills the man raping Marcus in order to protect his friend. But in the ninth scene of the film (before and during the party), it becomes clear that an animus exists between Marcus and Pierre and that Marcus is now living with the woman—Alex—whom Pierre has dated and still loves. While the three are taking the subway to the party, Pierre's sexual failings and Marcus's ability to please Alex are the subjects of the conversation. Marcus is not so much a friend of Pierre as his sexual rival who is constantly taunting him for his attitude toward romance and toward life in general. Pierre is, as Marcus sees it, too intellectual for his own good. This knowledge changes our understanding of Pierre's defense of Marcus.

When he brings the fire extinguisher to the head of the man in the club, Pierre is working out a complex psychosexual dynamic. On the one hand, the rape of Marcus represents Pierre's fantasy. Marcus has just spent a considerable amount of time deriding Pierre's sexual acumen and mocking his (implicitly feminine) inability to stop thinking and simply act. Now, Pierre sees Marcus emasculated by the rape and unable to act to prevent it, and this is the result of Marcus's hypermasculine pursuit of vengeance. In this sense, Pierre can enjoy the violence done to Marcus. But on the other hand, the rape of Marcus testifies to Pierre's sexual inadequacy and his excessive intellectualism because Pierre is unable to prevent this violence. In this sense, it confirms Marcus's indictment of him. When Pierre intervenes on Marcus's behalf, he proves that he is not simply a toothless intellectual unable to act passionately. He acts in the way that he does in order to convince himself that he is the only adequate sexual partner for Alex: unlike her current boyfriend Marcus, he has the requisite strength to prevent a rape. It is precisely Pierre's conflicted relationship to what he sees—he both enjoys seeing Marcus being raped and feels appalled by it—that occasions his ultraviolent response.

None of Pierre's troubled relationship to Marcus is present for spectators when they view this scene. They experience instead the disturbing camera work, the haunting mise-en-scène in the club, and a graphic beating that is almost impossible to watch in its entirety. Everything that takes place after (diegetically before) the scene in the club has the effect of mediating what spectators see in this scene. This mediation doesn't dampen or dilute the trauma of this scene, but rather broadens it. The trauma ceases to be simply that of damage to the physical body and becomes implicated with the psyche. The mediation that the subsequent scenes provide allows the spectator to pinpoint the nature of the trauma and to see how it touches all aspects of the characters' lives—not just that of Pierre, but also that of Marcus.

The three scenes following Pierre's violent act in the club reveal Marcus as crazily out of control. He breaks the windshield of a cab with a crowbar, screams racist insults at a cab driver, steals a cab, and assaults a prostitute. Through the course of these scenes, the fact of Alex's rape becomes known, and this provides insight into

the motivation for Marcus's extreme behavior. He seems genuinely enraged by the rape and determined to exact vengeance. In this sense, his actions at the club form a continuous chain with what comes just before in the diegetic time. But the sixth scene constitutes a radical break that completely reshapes the experience of the initial traumatic event.

In this scene, which begins with the police interrogating Pierre, Marcus's dramatic quest for revenge takes on an entirely new light. The film depicts Marcus as distraught in the aftermath of Alex's rape, which he has just learned about from the police after he left the party. At this point, it appears that he is simply overcome by despair and has no taste for revenging the rape, though we know that later he will display an unrelenting zeal for vengeance. The end of the film's sixth scene depicts this transformation and reveals the catalyst for Marcus's excessive behavior.

Two men approach Marcus and Pierre and offer their services, for a fee, to aid in tracking down the man who raped Alex. At first, Marcus shows no interest in the offer; he feels content to leave this task to the police. But when the two men impugn his masculinity, Marcus soon decides to act. Here, we see that his desire to avenge the rape of Alex, which represents the driving force in the previous four scenes of the film, has its origin not in the rape itself but in the taunting of two anonymous men. Marcus pursues vengeance not as a result of his attachment to Alex but because he must prove that he is the kind of man who avenges a wrong.

As *Irréversible* shows, the link between masculinity and vengeance lies in their shared investment in temporality as a proving ground that will deliver the goods. Time will permit the male subject to prove his masculinity, and it will also provide a satisfying vengeance. But in both cases, time commits a necessary betrayal. No proof of masculinity will ever be enough, just as no act of revenge will ever be truly satisfying. Masculinity relies to such an extent on the idea of vengeance because vengeance is the primordial form of the logic of desire that animates male subjectivity. It promises a future in which the lost object will be recovered. The violence that Marcus and Pierre perpetuate in the film's opening scenes becomes, after the film's sixth scene, visible in a

completely new light. A similar reevaluation occurs with the rape of Alex.

The rape, as Noé depicts it, is a meaningless act of arbitrary violence. As we are watching it, it appears as nothing but an index of the violence of urban life in Paris. Its trauma seems to be embodied fully in the event itself—the sadism of the rape, the extreme violence of the ensuing assault, and so on. The graphic depiction needs nothing to augment its traumatic impact. What's more, within the scene the film provides evidence for the unpredictable and arbitrary nature of the assault. As Alex prepares to cross a busy street, a woman advises her to take the underground passageway for the sake of safety. By avoiding the risk of being hit by oncoming cars, Alex ends up encountering a pimp attacking one of his prostitutes, which leads to the pimp attacking her. Not only does this show that there is no absolute safety, it also emphasizes that the attack is just a chance occurrence that nothing could have prevented.[10]

Yet the following scene shows that a quarrel between Alex and Marcus—precipitated by Marcus's outlandish behavior at a party—led to Alex leaving the party early and by herself. Had she left with Marcus and Pierre as she had no doubt intended, the rape would never have occurred. Though the rape remains a chance event, it ceases to appear as unpreventable. Clearly Marcus is not the rapist and does not share the rapist's culpability, but the film stresses that his behavior ended up exposing Alex to danger. As we see him flirting with other women at the party, using cocaine, and treating both Alex and Pierre cruelly, his connection to the subsequent violence that Alex endures deepens.[11] She leaves the party in a vulnerable state as a result of Marcus's behavior there.

The other scenes that follow in the film add to the traumatic impact of the rape and further underline the link between this event and the moments of happiness. In the eleventh scene of the film (a scene of apparent domestic bliss between Alex and Marcus), Alex recounts a dream of being in a red tunnel that is broken in two. Later, Marcus tells Alex that he wants to have anal sex with her. For the spectator, these two moments amidst the happiness of this scene connect this happiness with the trauma that comes in the future. The rapist will attack Alex in a red tunnel, and he will rape her anally. Noé

includes these obvious allusions to the future not in order to show that fate controls all aspects of the characters' lives but to reveal the relationship between the traumatic event and the apparent bliss that surrounds it.

The point is not that there is no such thing as bliss—that trauma wipes out any enjoyment that we might believe we experience—but that trauma is a part of bliss and inseparable from it. When we view the traumatic event as an isolated phenomenon of the past or the future, we fail to see how it informs every present. Recognizing that there is no moment free from trauma does dilute the moments of happiness, but it also changes our relationship to trauma. Instead of being an experience that we work to avoid at all costs—and thereby make it more unbearable—it becomes the sine qua non of our existence. This changed relationship to trauma is what *Irréversible* attempts to effect in the spectator.

THE TWIRLING DRIVE

The attitude that *Irréversible* adopts relative to time is most evident in its reverse chronology. But this aspect of the film's structure is also potentially misleading: the backward movement in time might have the effect of highlighting the importance of time and the irreducibility of our temporal nature. Nothing about a reverse chronology guarantees that a film will use it to reveal the repetition of the drive rather than the forward movement of temporality. But in *Irréversible*, Noé supplements reverse chronology with other formal distortions.

The most important formal device in *Irréversible* is the twirling camera that Noé uses throughout the film. The film begins with the credits running in reverse, and as they finish, the camera begins the circular motion that it will repeat at various points throughout. In the opening scene, a series of twirling camera movements in darkness reveal an old brick building. The camera finally enters the building and focuses on the naked body of the Butcher (Philippe Nahon), a character from Noé's previous film *Seul contre tous* (*I Stand Alone*, 1998). The twirling camera becomes even more present in the second scene as Marcus and Pierre enter Le Rectum.

Though the camera stops to focus on Marcus and Pierre at times, throughout most of the scene in the club it continues in the twirling motion that allows only a fleeting view of the mise-en-scène at any point. Though Marcus and Pierre enter into and move through the club in this scene, they do not appear to be moving on their own volition. It is as if the force of the camera itself is driving their movements, and this force refuses to allow them to think about what they are doing or alter their course. They are caught up in a pure unthinking drive that circulates with the movement of the camera rather than moving forward.

During the rampage through the club, the audio track heightens the effect of the twirling camera with its slowly pulsating low-pitched whine. This sound persists throughout most of the scene in the club, and it makes the scene much more painful for the spectator. The effect of this seemingly ceaseless pulsating sound is similar to that of a cinematic scream. In *The Voice in Cinema*, Michel Chion characterizes the scream as a moment of timelessness within a film. He says, "The screaming point is a point of the unthinkable inside the thought, of the indeterminate inside the spoken, of unrepresentability inside representation. It occupies a point in time, but has no duration within. It suspends the time of its possible duration; it's a rip in the fabric of time."[12] In a similar way, the audio track of the club scene in *Irréversible* disrupts the usual sense of filmic time, though it doesn't exactly suspend time in the manner of the scream. Instead, the pulsating sound, like the twirling camera movements, creates a sense of an unending and painful repetition—a repetition lying outside of any subjective control.

The conclusion of the film accentuates the twirling camera to an even greater extent than the opening scene or the scene depicting the entrance into Le Rectum. The film's twelfth (and final) scene depicts Alex reading on the ground in a park. The first image of her appears upside down until the camera turns and begins to move above her. After the camera pulls back from Alex and moves upward, it turns toward a group of children running through a sprinkler. From above, it moves in a way that mirrors the circular motion of the sprinkler. Here, the twirling motion of the camera that Noé has used throughout the film meets a content appropriate to it. For the first time, the twirling motion seems to approximate the movement that it captures.

This repetitive circular movement of the sprinkler and the camera represents the concluding—and most important—image of the film. Noé ends with a movement that indicates repetition rather than temporal movement forward.

Neither the sprinkler nor the children running through the water it sprays move forward. They continue to turn in a circular fashion that patterns itself on the drive—a motion activated by time but resistant to the forward movement of temporality. The use of the twirling camera in *Irréversible* marks Noé's attempt to capture the logic of the drive in an aspect of the film's form. The motion remains the same even as the content that the camera views changes. The form continues without regard to its content, just as the drive continues its circular motion without regard to its object. The film's highlighting of the drive at the expense of the object puts it at odds with major currents in contemporary thought.

REVERSING PHENOMENOLOGY

The primary philosophical target of the critique that *Irréversible* articulates is phenomenology. The founding principle of phenomenology—a principle that continues to dominate much contemporary thought—insists on the priority of experience. Experience occurs before understanding, and the attempt to make sense of it takes place after the fact and can never fully catch up to experience. That is to say, we experience before we theorize. As Edmund Husserl puts it in the *Cartesian Meditations*, "phenomenological explication does nothing but *explicate the sense this world has for us, prior to any philosophizing*, and obviously gets solely from our experience—*a sense which philosophy can uncover but never alter*, and which, because of an essential necessity, not because of our weakness, entails (in the case of any actual experience) horizons that need fundamental clarification."[13] We need phenomenology as a philosophy, according to Husserl, because we don't recognize the sense of the world as it appears in our original experience. This experience inevitably becomes beclouded by implicit and explicit theorizing that disguises it and renders it alien. Phenomenology's celebrated return to the things themselves is a return to experience prior to the theorization of it.[14]

The construction of philosophical systems like Plato's theory of forms or Hegel's logic has the effect of masking the priority of experience. Through the way that they privilege knowledge of the world, systematic philosophies fail to account for how this knowledge comes about, which is necessary through a series of experiences. We don't know all at once but over a period of time, and our theories of knowledge should reflect the way that knowing works. According to Martin Heidegger, it is Immanuel Kant who first injects temporality into knowing. Whereas earlier thinkers in Western philosophy conceive of knowledge as occurring all at once (and thus reduce it to understanding), Kant opens up knowledge to temporality through the role that he gives to the transcendental power of imagination. This is what creates the horizon of possibilities in which we can know, and it is a power identical with time itself. In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger says straightforwardly, "the transcendental power of imagination is original time."[15] By giving the transcendental power of imagination the key role in the process of knowing, Kant takes the first step to emancipating thought from neglect of temporality that prevailed from Plato to Descartes. As Heidegger puts it, "Time and the 'I think' no longer stand incompatibly and incomparably at odds; they are the same."[16] The status of the Cartesian subject undergoes a seismic shift.

It falls to phenomenology—figures like Husserl, Heidegger himself, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—to complete the Kantian revolution and thoroughly come to terms with the dependence of knowledge on experience in time. This dependence leads phenomenology to link our knowledge of the world not just to the structure of subjectivity (as Kant does in the first *Critique*) but to the attitude that we take up toward the world. As Husserl sees it, a directed activity of consciousness informs all objective knowledge. In the first book of his *Ideas*, he claims, "In every actional cogito a radiating 'regard' is directed from the pure Ego to the 'object' of the consciousness-correlate in question, to the physical thing, to the affair-complex, etc., and effects the very kinds of consciousness *of* it."[17] That is, what Husserl later calls the ego's ray of attention helps to form the objectivity of the objective world, and the process of its formation is an inextricable part of it to which we constantly return in order to avoid reifying that world.

Heidegger would eventually extend this idea and conclude that objects exist for us primordially in their usefulness.[18] Our attitude of caring about the world—viewing objects as useful for our projects—causes the world to arise as a world, and authentic knowledge thus becomes knowledge of the original usefulness of world. Rather than knowing a series of propositions or facts about the world, one knows how it comes to be constituted as a world. One knows, for instance, a hammer as a tool for changing and manipulating the world (as something ready-to-hand or *zuhanden*) rather than as an object that one sees and knows in the world (as something present-at-hand or *vorhanden*). For Heidegger, this is the endpoint of phenomenology and the key to the insertion of temporality into knowledge. Any knowledge that fails to account for the emergence of the world as a world ipso facto resigns itself to hypostatized facts rather than actual knowledge.

The key to grasping the world lies in understanding the fundamental temporality of the subject. Rather than conceiving of the temporal realm as an external arena into which the subject enters, the great figures of phenomenology identify time with the subject itself. One cannot extricate the subject from time because it carries temporality with it and has no existence outside of temporality. Heidegger insists that we view "time as in each case mine."[19] According to Merleau-Ponty, "I am myself time."[20] For Sartre, the subject is "the being which has to be its being in the diasporatic form of Temporality."[21] When we identify time with subjectivity and cease to view it as something existing outside of ourselves, we will know in a more authentic way. Our knowledge will begin to emerge out of experience rather than necessitating the elimination of experience.

Though the tagline of *Irréversible*—"Le temps détruit tout" ("Time destroys everything")—appears to signal an embrace of the phenomenological privileging of the inexorable movement of time, the film itself belies this impression. The implicit contention of *Irréversible* is that though the systematic nature of knowledge may hide the temporality of knowing, temporality itself occasions its own deception, a deception that phenomenology aids in perpetuating. Of course, time passes, and knowledge accrues through time rather than

arriving all at once. But focusing on the temporality of the process of knowing—and on temporality as such—has the effect of obscuring the way that traumatic loss conditions all experience. Our inability to properly access trauma does not derive from a failure to consider ourselves as temporal beings but from a misconception of our relationship to time.

The collision between the temporality of the biological organism and the synchronic social structure produces the repetition of the drive that characterizes the subject. The subject is neither an eternal substance that never changes nor a being in flux given completely over to time. It moves through time, but it does so through a process of constant repetition. The repetition of the drive depends on the subject's insertion in time, but this repetition always defies time and marks the subject's refusal to submit to the ameliorative powers of time. For the subject of the drive, time perpetuates its wounds rather than healing them.

The time of the biological world operates through constant change. The continual motion of molecules prohibits any stable identity over time. Every moment entails a new arrangement of every being, even if appearances create the semblance of identity. No such constant change occurs in a social structure: though societies undergo transformations, at every moment they provide a frame of reference that largely remains the same over time. The signifying order is a synchronic structure that arrests the flow of biological life and constructs stable identities out of that flow. The drive emerges through the collision between the temporality of life and the eternity of the social structure. The subject's repetition is neither temporal nor eternal but the product of the incompatibility of biological life with the order of the signifier.[22]

This conception of the subject, which *Irréversible* propagates, allows us to view experience in a different way. Rather than being the site for the subject's encounter with the truth of its temporality, experience becomes part of a deception that leads the subject to misunderstand the very nature of subjectivity.[23] Privileging experience blinds the subject to the circularity of the drive. As *Irréversible* conceives it, experience functions as a protection from trauma. Because we experience events as they unfold temporally, we experience

trauma as merely fleeting and thus as ameliorable. In time, we can find a solution to trauma.

Irréversible leads spectators through the misrecognition that derives from privileging experience and then facilitates an awareness of this misrecognition. In this way, it creates an opportunity for spectators to recognize themselves as subjects of the drive. It provides a corrective to the contemporary spate of films that bombard spectators with the immediacy of great spectacle meant to simply be experienced and understood through experience. Noé's film offers spectators a new and more powerful conception of cinematic trauma.

THE RETREAT OF THE MACHINIST

The reverse chronology in *Irréversible* strips the spectator of any insulation against the trauma of the events. In order to accomplish this stripping away, this formal device is necessary because standard cinematic temporality cannot adequately facilitate the spectator's encounter with trauma. It is true, however, that when we watch traumatic events in a film constructed chronologically, we can experience the inevitability of trauma. A director can construct scenes and sequences in a way that portends an unavoidable traumatic event that slowly approaches. This is the case in a film like Tim Robbins's *Dead Man Walking* (1995). From the very choice of a title for the film, Robbins rejects suspense about the eventual outcome and subjects spectators to almost two hours of movement toward the execution of Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn), a character with whom the film has established sympathy, despite eventually revealing his guilt. The sense of inevitability is furthered by the widely disseminated knowledge that Robbins based the film on the memoir of Sister Helen Prejean, which chronicled her experience with the actual Matthew Poncelet, who was executed. *Dead Man Walking* exemplifies the use of film to show us the impossibility of avoiding the encounter with trauma, but it suffers in another way from the formal limitation occasioned by its chronological structure.

Although Robbins does use flashback to revisit Matthew's crime, his film nonetheless follows a linear temporality. As a result, trauma,

though inevitable, also has an end point. This is the limitation that affects all depictions of traumatic events in chronological films: though trauma can appear as inevitable in a chronological film, it necessarily also appears resolvable—or at least able to be transcended. The traumatic event, such as Matthew's execution, is temporally located, and time continues to pass after this event. The simple forward movement of time indicates that one can move beyond trauma, even if the traumatic event marks the end of the film. When a film ends with a traumatic event that occurs within chronological temporality, the movement of time taking place prior to the trauma implicitly continues afterward and thereby allows one to imagine the resolution of the trauma.

This is the case even among the exemplary instances of traumatic endings in cinema, films such as George Sluizer's *Spooloos* (*The Vanishing*, 1988) or Philip Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978). When we see Rex Hofman (Gene Bervoets) buried alive in the horrific final scene of *The Vanishing* and are in a sense buried with him as Sluizer films inside the coffin, we experience the trauma of an inescapable and terminal confinement. When we see Matthew Bennell (Donald Sutherland) scream at former friend Nancy Bellicec (Veronica Cartwright) and thus identify her to the body snatchers, we experience the trauma of betrayal and of imminent loss of identity. But in both these instances, the temporality of the film mitigates the trauma. The fact that both films establish a chronology in which time incessantly moves forward allows the spectator to view the concluding trauma as an event that will pass, even if it doesn't for the character who undergoes it. Life in the filmic universe continues despite the death or destruction of a figure within it. The temporality that the films construct renders an engagement with trauma unsustainable. Time heals all wounds, including death, and this is the problem with an investment in temporality.

Of course, an atemporal structure doesn't provide any guarantee that a film will depict trauma as inescapable. Brad Anderson's *The Machinist* (2004) employs a nonlinear temporality structured around a central traumatic event, yet it ultimately points to the possibility of overcoming the trauma. It thus represents the perfect contrast

with *Irréversible*. At the beginning of the film, we see Trevor Reznik (Christian Bale) murder Ivan (John Sharian) and attempt to dispose of the body, and later we see the same scene again with the understanding that Ivan is nothing but Reznik's fantasized double and that there is in fact no body. The film shows Reznik stuck in the repetition of the same situations even as they take different forms. His attempts to break out of this traumatic repetition by, for instance, going to the carnival with his new girlfriend Marie (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón) and her son Nicholas (Matthew Romero Moore) only thrust himself deeper into it. In this sequence, Reznik repeats the foundational trauma of the film—running over a small child with his car and then driving away—by taking Nicholas on a terrifying carnival ride that triggers an epileptic seizure. The circularity of the temporal structure in *The Machinist* highlights the inescapability of this foundational trauma (which is fully revealed only toward the end of the film). But the film does not sustain this circularity throughout its entire running time.

The conclusion of *The Machinist* nicely shows how the overcoming of trauma necessitates a forward-moving temporality. Though the majority of the film remains within the repetition occasioned by the traumatic event, the last part of the film marks a departure from repetition to typical chronology. The ending allows for Reznik to find redemption by turning himself into the police and confessing his guilt. In the jail cell, Reznik is finally able to sleep—he has had insomnia throughout the entire film—and to put the hit-and-run accident behind him. The film is important not so much for its overtly Christian idea of confession and forgiveness but for the link that it forges between a shift in the form of the film and the movement beyond the traumatic event.[24] The abandonment of the atemporal structure that characterizes most of *The Machinist* leads to the abandonment of trauma. In this way, the film's formal retreat becomes the springboard for a political retreat.

There is no such retreat in *Irréversible*. Because the film begins with the end, which is itself a traumatic event, it provides no foreseeable temporal respite from the trauma. Unlike a chronological film (or an atemporal film that turns to forward moving chronology, like *The Machinist*), one cannot watch *Irréversible* and hope that

the future will eliminate the trauma. The end has already occurred for the film's spectators, and they must view all the events leading up to this end with full knowledge of it. The atemporal structure of the film renders the trauma unsolvable and irredeemable in a way that would be impossible in a traditional narrative. The relationship between respite from trauma and linear temporality explains why Gaspar Noé opts for—and sustains—an atemporal structure in *Irréversible*.

A TIME FOR HOMOPHOBIA

If *Irréversible* expands the impact of trauma for the spectator, it appears to do so by indulging in an extreme homophobia. Not only is the rapist of Alex a gay pimp who rapes her anally, but the film confronts the spectator with a barrage of antigay slurs and negative depictions of gay sexuality. It is difficult to think of a film in which gay sexuality—specifically, gay male sexuality—has such threatening overtones. It is as if gay male sex and its practitioners represent a dangerous vortex that threatens to suck up all forms of heterosexual vitality. A gay club provides the milieu where Marcus is raped and Pierre insanely beats a man to death, and a gay man rapes Alex and destroys the life growing inside her.

Clearly, one cannot look to *Irréversible* for positive representations of gay sexuality or for gay characters with whom one might identify, but this does not necessarily mean that we must indict the film for homophobia. Despite the absence of positive gay figures, the film is much more an indictment of homophobia than a perpetuation of it. That is, just as Noé presents traumatic events in a way that ensures that they will be initially misunderstood, he depicts homosexuality as a threat only in order to counter the homophobic response to it. The negative depictions of gay sexuality act as a seduction for the spectator that subsequent scenes in the film reveal to be the product of a homophobic attitude.

The second scene of the film depicting the entrance of Marcus and Pierre into the club presents gay male sexuality as an obscene and threatening source of enjoyment. In fact, it seems as if they are descending into hell. Allan Cameron seems completely correct to

note that "the most objectionable feature of this film is undoubtedly its presentation of homosexuality, with the ludicrous yet apparently serious suggestion that a gay nightclub is the closest one can get to Hell on earth."[25] When Marcus and Pierre enter the club, they are literally entering into Le Rectum, as if they were themselves being thrust into sodomy. Once inside, they encounter all sorts of gay male sexuality that assaults their senses and those of the spectator at every moment. The twirling of the camera, the grating oscillation of the low-pitched sound, the fleeting shots of various sexual acts, the frantic behavior of Marcus—all of these factors make the experience almost impossible to withstand for both the spectator and the principal characters.

But the end of this scene reveals that Marcus and Pierre, not the participants in the sexual acts that they see, represent the real danger. Marcus behaves aggressively toward many men in the club and finally assaults the man whom he believes to be La Tenia. After this man responds by raping Marcus, Pierre brutally kills him by smashing his face multiple times with a fire extinguisher. Marcus is the instigator of the aggression, and Pierre is the perpetuator of the worst violence. The film initially sets up Le Rectum as a threat that they—and the spectator—must confront, but it soon becomes clear that they themselves are the threat to the men inside, who are simply having sex. Later scenes in the film reveal that Pierre's sexual inadequacy and Marcus's cocaine use have informed the events that take place in the club. Pierre experiences the gay sex club as threatening because Marcus has constantly reminded him of his failures of heterosexual masculinity with Alex and other women, and Marcus's drug use heightens his aggression long before they enter the club. Furthermore, the later scenes also expose Marcus's homophobia, as we see him incessantly utter the slur "*pédé*," the French equivalent of "fag." The knowledge that comes with seeing these scenes demands that the spectator rethink the initial experience of the descent into Le Rectum.

Le Rectum appears like hell on earth not because the film conceives it as such, but because this is how Marcus and Pierre experience it. Through the dizzying camera work and disturbing audio track, the film aligns the spectator with Marcus and Pierre during the scene.

But this alignment changes as the film moves backward in time. Each subsequent scene further reveals that the gay sex club is not a nightmare in itself but only for Marcus and Pierre, and it is a nightmare for them because of their own pathologies. They both in some way see themselves in the practices or images that they associate with the gay man—Marcus expresses a desire for sodomy, and Pierre worries about his emasculation—and this makes the confrontation with open displays of gay sexuality unbearable for them. By laying bare this dimension of their characters after the scene in the club, Noé forces spectators to reinterpret their response to this nightmarish opening. If one experienced it as a nightmare along with Marcus and Pierre, one must call into question one's own relationship to gay sexuality. Rather than advancing homophobia, the film indulges in it only in order to undermine it, and it is the atemporal structure of the film that enables such a project.

Many queer theorists have noted that the privileging of reproduction, futurity, and ends as such demands the repression of queer sexuality, which explicitly does not aim at anything beyond the pleasure it produces. Heterosexism justifies itself on the basis of this absence of a biological justification for gay sex. In his classic treatise on homosexual desire, Guy Hocquenghem notes that "homosexual desire is the ungenerating-ungenerated terror of the family, because it produces itself without reproducing."[26] Homosexual desire threatens to swallow all desire and eliminate the role of reproduction in desire, which is why it represents a "terror." Judith Roof goes even further, linking the heterosexual emphasis on the end of sex—the child—with the structure of narrative. She contends, "Interwound with one another, narrative and sexuality operate within the reproductive and/or productive, metaphorically heterosexual ideology that also underwrites the naturalized understanding of the shape and meaning of life."[27] As Roof sees it, there is no escape from this equation between narrative and the heterosexist privileging of the end. Every story incessantly moves toward its end, even when a radical discourse disturbs the audience's access to the story.

But *Irréversible* defies the implicitly heterosexist privileging of the end by beginning with the end and illustrating how the

end is not simply one isolated point toward which narrative—or sexuality—moves. Through its formal structure, the film links the end to everything that occurs earlier in the diegetic time, and this changes the experience of every moment. Noé doesn't break with narrative itself, but he uses narrative to expose the deception inherent in the typical narrative trajectory. In this sense, he creates a film that, despite its negative representations of gay sexuality, launches an incisive indictment of the heterosexist championing of the end and of homophobia in general.

TIME DESTROYS TRAUMA

Irréversible ends with a black screen and the title, "*Le temps detruit tout*" ("Time destroys everything"). This concluding moral appears self-evident: we think that there the present is brimming with possibilities, but the passing of time will reveal them all to be ultimately fruitless. The hope embodied in Alex's pregnancy will be extinguished in her brutal rape, and even the quest for revenge will not find its proper target. The film's penultimate scene shows the burgeoning love of Alex and Marcus (resulting in the newly discovered pregnancy), and the film concludes with the idyllic scene of Alex reading a book while lying in a park on a sunlit afternoon. The structure of the film prevents spectators from taking part in the happiness that the characters feel because, unlike the characters, the spectators know what misery the future will bring. The characters live in the present, while the film's spectator's watch with an awareness of the passing of time (and of its destructiveness).

The movie poster of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) that the camera focuses on just after Alex learns of her pregnancy seems to signify a clear contrast with the tone of *Irréversible*: whereas Kubrick concludes with the hopefulness of the birth of the Star Child, Noé concludes with a pregnancy that will apparently end in miscarriage after a violent rape (if Alex survives at all). Kubrick's science fiction film looks out to a future in which humanity not only realizes its dreams of space exploration, but also discovers a reality that transcends humanity itself. The birth of the Star Child testifies to

the overcoming of all the limitations of the human condition—death, aging, the physical body. *Irréversible* moves toward the past, not the future, in order to show the ineluctable nature of these limitations. This movement appears to indict time as the source of human suffering.

But when the film says that time destroys everything, one should take this claim even further than what might at first seem suggested. Time destroys not only the possibilities and hopes of the present, but also our ability to grasp the constitutive nature of trauma. The destructiveness of time extends to our way of conceiving our experience. By thinking in terms of temporality and conceiving temporality as the foundation of our existence, we misapprehend our relationship to trauma. By reversing our typical experience of time, *Irréversible* makes the full extent of trauma visible for us as spectators.

Our investment in temporality causes us to miss the absence of openness in our condition. Viewing ourselves as temporal beings, we believe in the possibility of the present; anything might happen in time. Of course, we know that what might happen could be traumatic—like our own death or the loss of a love object. Though we fear the traumatic changes associated with time, we take comfort in its ability to provide us with difference and newness. The prominent critics of *Irréversible* have seized on the role of contingency in the events depicted in order to conceive of it as a film emphasizing the openness of possibilities within time. According to Eugenie Brinkema, "The final printed words of the film, 'Le temps détruit tout,' suggest their double opposite—time produces everything and time destroys nothing at all, the double negation itself suggesting a surge of positive creation."[28] And according to Riccardo de los Rios and Robert Davis, "the film's rewinding narrative structure affords the viewer insight that precludes the functioning of some of the more traditional narrative elements such as suspense, planting and payoff, sympathy, and, principally, closure. Indeed, *Irréversible* dismisses the notion of closure itself as a hollow dramatic construct."[29] Ironically, these commentators on the film see Noé's decision to begin with the ending—that is, with closure—as a way of asserting the film's lack of closure. But what this line of thought misses is that even if

Noé rejects the idea of temporal closure, he nonetheless formulates a conception of atemporal closure in *Irréversible*.[30]

Though the film shows how certain events may have turned out differently if one action had been slightly different, it still insists on the absolute status of the closure in which the characters exist. The particular traumatic events that the characters—and the spectators—experience could be avoided, but trauma itself inheres in the subject's condition. All possibilities lead back to the loss that constitutes the subject, and the film allows the spectator to see the inescapability of this loss. What the film shows to be irreversible is not time, as its final words suggest, but the repetition of the drive, which only death can put an end to. With this, *Irréversible* punctuates the atemporal mode of cinema.

An Infinite *Memento*

Grasping the foundational status of time requires acceding to finitude as our ultimate horizon. Just as artists, scientists, and philosophers of the twentieth century tried to integrate time into thought, they also attempted to affirm the inescapability of finitude. We reject temporality because we cannot accept finitude, and we construct the idea of eternity in order to avoid it.[1] Major philosophers and physicists of the twentieth century explain the denial of temporality in this manner. In *The Direction of Time*, for instance, physicist Hans Reichenbach contends that our failure to properly understand time stems from our flight from death. He argues, "The desire to survive death and to live eternally, in the sense of an unlimited time, a desire obviously incompatible with physical facts, has thus led to a conception in which eternal life is not life in time, but in a different reality. In order to escape the 'passing away' with time, a timeless reality was invented."[2] For Reichenbach, the theoretical failure to understand time emerges out of the trauma attached to temporal existence, which is precisely how Martin Heidegger characterizes the existential flight from being-toward-death. The central problem for the physicist and the philosopher in the twentieth century is reconciling the difficulty of temporality with a mode of being and thought that resists it.[3] Our psyche seems ill-equipped to confront the finitude in which we exist. Procuring the ability—and the

courage—to think in terms of finitude becomes a central scientific and philosophical project of the twentieth century.

It is an inherent preoccupation of cinematic art as well. As Gilles Deleuze makes clear in the second of his books devoted to cinema, producing an image of time emerges in the middle of the twentieth century as the essence of cinema that existed in a hidden form from the beginning of film. He notes, "It took modern cinema to reread the whole of cinema as already made up of aberrant movements and false continuity shots. The direct time-image is the phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom."[4] In the time-image, cinema foregrounds the passing of time and reveals that movement occurs within and through temporality.

By highlighting film's temporal possibilities, modern cinema plays a role in the existential struggle that defined the twentieth century—the attempt to embrace rather than flee human finitude. By simply attending the modern cinema, spectators immerse themselves in their own temporality. But in the wake of the digital revolution, the great existential problem is no longer exclusively that of temporality and death. A new difficulty pushes itself to the fore. Though this revolution does not eliminate temporal decay and death, digital technology does create a viable image of a world in which time ceases to be a central point of reference. Digital techniques of preservation allow for an atemporal existence: even as the medium housing what is preserved decays, the data that is preserved does not. A digitally recorded voice sounds the same a minute after it has been recorded and a century later. This victory over the problem of time has not, of course, eliminated all anxiety about aging and death. In fact, it may even have exacerbated it. But what it does introduce is the possibility of thinking in terms other than temporal ones.

Though we tend to associate time and our temporality with trauma, it is actually thinking outside time that reveals the inescapable and constitutive nature of trauma. Even without the loss that time introduces, loss remains constitutive for our thought because our subjectivity emerges with it and depends on it. Loss inaugurates the desiring subject and gives the subject a reason to take an interest in the world of objects. Our concern for the world has its basis in loss.

As Freud points out in his brief but groundbreaking essay "Negation," "a precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction."[5] That is, we approach reality itself with the loss of the privileged object always in the background, and this lost object leads to the formation of the drive. The series of losses that we experience in time reenact the initial loss that defines us as subjects and orients us toward the world.

For thinkers such as Bergson and Heidegger, who are invested in the constitutive dimension of our temporality, the idea of thinking outside of time has always seemed like a fugitive act. Plato posits eternal forms and Augustine associates God with eternity because they can't bring themselves to accede to the horror of finitude. To embrace temporality is to confront the difficult truth that a concept like eternity masks. But atemporality bears its own difficult truth, and in the light of this truth, temporality can be understood as just another form of existential flight.[6] The digital revolution brings to the fore the problem of eternity and the eternal inescapability of trauma.

This shift in the fundamental existential problem is in the foreground of Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), which focuses on a character who exists literally outside temporality. As the film depicts it, time functions as a potential respite from the eternity of the traumatic event, and our existential task involves not reconciling ourselves to our temporality but to atemporality and its inescapable trauma. The film's main character and narrator, Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), suffers from what he calls anterograde amnesia, a disorder that leaves him unable to form new memories since sustaining a head trauma when his wife was attacked by an intruder or intruders. *Memento* depicts Leonard in pursuit of vengeance for his wife's rape and murder. Though he killed one intruder during the assault, he is convinced that a second assailant clubbed him on the head and murdered his wife (though authorities deny the existence of this second intruder). Nolan divides the film into two parts—one that proceeds in reverse chronological order through roughly five-minute segments that end where the previous segment began, and another interspersed in the former that moves forward and primarily depicts Leonard talking on the phone in his hotel room. The part of the film that moves in reverse chronology is in color, and the part that moves forward in time is in

black and white. The two timelines meet at the end of the film: just after Leonard believes that he kills his wife's murderer, Jimmy Grants (Larry Holden), the film stock almost imperceptibly shifts from black and white to color. But the meeting of forward and reverse chronology does not function as an ultimate moment of revelation.

The conclusion of the film reveals that Leonard has most likely not revenged his wife. In fact, neither this killing nor the killing of Teddy (Joe Pantoliano) at the beginning of the film (the chronological end) provide Leonard or the spectator with any sense of having resolved the trauma. According to the story that Teddy tells Leonard just after Leonard kills Jimmy Grants, he has killed a series of guys standing in for the murderer of his wife. Teddy explains,

> Look, Lenny, I was the cop assigned to your wife's case. I believed you. I thought you deserved a chance for revenge. I'm the guy who helped you find the other guy in your bathroom that night, the guy that cracked your skull and fucked your wife. We found him. You killed him. But you didn't remember, so I helped you start looking again, looking for the guy you already killed. . . . I gave you a reason to live, and you were more than happy to help. You don't want the truth. . . . You, you wander around, you play detective. You live in a dream, kid. A dead wife to pine for, a sense of purpose to your life, a romantic quest that you wouldn't end, even if I wasn't in the picture.

Viewers of the film tend to have mixed feelings about the veracity of Teddy's story, but it is clear that killing Jimmy Grants does not provide Leonard any satisfaction and that he later kills Teddy on the basis of a lie to himself that unjustifiably implicates Teddy in the murder of his wife.

By stripping temporality away from Leonard and by confusing the typical forward movement of cinematic time, Christopher Nolan cuts off all possible escape from the traumatic event for both Leonard and the spectator. Because he can't form new memories, time doesn't move forward for Leonard. He exists continually in the wake of the trauma of his wife's death, and he is unable to move beyond it. There is no possibility that time will heal his wounds or render the trauma

less proximate. This is why, given his condition, Leonard cannot avenge his wife in a way that he might find successful or satisfying. His plan for discovering the identity of the killer and exacting revenge fails, insofar as it represents Leonard's investment in a temporal solution to an atemporal problem. Our temporality leads us to believe that we can solve the problem of trauma through the passing of time, and revenge represents the ultimate investment in the power of time to solve trauma: when I enact revenge, I believe that the act of vengeance will provide some measure of compensation for the loss I have suffered. But there can be no revenge for the foundational loss that defines us as subjects, and this is what the atemporal form of *Memento* makes visible.

Nolan structures the form of *Memento* so that the spectator occupies the same position relative to time that Leonard does. Though the time that passes during viewing allows for the spectator to gain knowledge, it does not bring the spectator any closer to gaining distance from the traumatic event through this knowledge. Like Leonard, the spectator remains unable to solve the puzzle no matter how much times passes because the trauma is irreducible to temporality's ameliorative effects. There is no answer waiting to be discovered in repeated viewings of the film because the answer lies completely exposed in the trauma itself. A traumatic rupture constitutes every subject as a subject, and it is this trauma that produces not only Leonard's repetition of the search for his wife's killer, but also the spectator's return to the cinema to see films like *Memento* that depict traumatic events.

Leonard, in this sense, stands in for the typical subject. Though most of us don't suffer from anterograde amnesia, we do nonetheless live with an inescapable trauma in the way that Leonard does. Leonard reaches for the temporal solution that most subjects are able to access more easily, but its failure in his case portends its failure in every case. Just as Leonard will forget each act of revenge and immerse himself repeatedly in the unavenged trauma of his wife's death, our embrace of the respite of temporality will never succeed in allowing us to move beyond trauma. There is no choice that escapes trauma, but there is a decision of whether to embrace repetition.

The twenty-first century is revealing to us that time does not represent the ultimate existential problem. Even if we succeed in accepting our human finitude and achieving an authentic being-toward-death, the problem of atemporality—or our infinitude—would remain, and it is precisely this problem that atemporal cinema explores. Its break of the bond between cinema and time represents a revolutionary upheaval. Through the use of nonstandard editing and unusual narrative structures, these films defy temporality in order to adhere to the circular logic of the drive. Time doesn't determine the occurrence of the events; instead, the events occur without regard for time. The insistence of the drive—its constant repetition of traumatic loss—creates a narrative logic that these films attempt to approximate through their various formal innovations. They thus present spectators with the opportunity to access a new mode of subjectivity that, paradoxically, refuses the allure of the new that accompanies temporal existence.

This cinematic revolution marks the conclusion of the spatialization of time that began in earnest with the onset of capitalism. Though the negative ramifications of this spatialization are quite evident and have been long discussed, it is possible to change our relationship to the spatialization of time by seeing within it the opportunity for locating the subject of the drive. Moving from a temporal subjectivity to a subjectivity of the drive implies moving beyond the promise of the ultimate enjoyment that fuels the capitalist demand to accumulate and that facilitates treating everything as a means to an unattainable end. The injustice of capitalism takes the injustice of temporal subjectivity as its starting point. But replacing the demand to accumulate with the repetition of the drive is the possibility that contemporary atemporal cinema accords us.

The great paradox of the emergence of atemporal cinema is that the aesthetic expression of atemporality occurs in the one art form inextricable from temporality. But it is precisely the temporal nature of the cinema that facilitates the cinematic discovery of atemporality. With the onset of the digital era, filmmakers had to struggle to express the ramifications of the spatialization of time in an irreducibly temporal medium. To do so, they resorted to formal distortions of cinematic temporality, and these distortions brought the atemporal logic of the

drive to light. Time works as the vehicle through which filmmakers discover atemporality. It becomes in this sense the ladder that one kicks out after its use, creating the occasion for its own evanescence. But using time to move beyond time ensures its return in the form of an obstacle that the cinema will never fully escape.

The problem of time will remain a central problem within the cinema, just as it will remain an existential problem. One constitutes the logic of the drive not by abandoning any idea of time, but by distinguishing the drive from the forward movement of time. This movement allows us to recognize ourselves in contrast. We can see only what remains the same against the background of time's constant change. We approach authenticity not through accessing our original temporality, but through distinguishing ourselves from the movement of time as beings of repetition.

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Notes

Preface

1. Vicky Lebeau makes this point in her description of apparatus theory. She contends, "The fictional reality of cinema depends for its effect on the unconscious forms of mental work at the very origin of the psyche. To push the point, the unconscious is the condition of cinema, essential to the very act of watching a film." Vicky Lebeau, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Play of Shadows* (London: Wallflower, 2001), 45.

2. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 63.

3. The critique launched by traditional apparatus theory focuses primarily on the repression of absence and difference in the continuous plenitude of the cinematic image. According to Jean-Louis Baudry, "The meaning effect produced does not depend only on the content of the images but also on the material procedures by which an illusion of continuity, dependent of the persistence of vision, is restored from discontinuous elements. These separate frames have between them differences that are indispensable for the creation of an illusion of continuity, of a continuous passage (movement, time). But only on one condition can these differences create this illusion: they must be effaced as differences." Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 290.

Introduction

1. The metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century certainly recognize the power of time and human finitude, which is why they often proclaim the importance of making full use of one's time. But time remains the terrain on which subjectivity operates rather than an intrinsic aspect of subjectivity itself. The metaphysical poets, unlike, say, Martin Heidegger, never allow temporality to affect their conception of the subject.

2. Occasionally, the different temporal revolutions are at odds with each other. This occurs when Henri Bergson attempts to draw out the philosophical implications of special relativity and challenges Einstein's notion of multiple times. In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson rejects special relativity's twin paradox, in which one twin on a rocket traveling close to the speed of light ages slower than another who remains on earth. This paradox involves the positing of an imaginary time that no one could actually live, and as Bergson sees it, time exists only insofar as it is lived. Positing Peter as the stationary twin and Paul as the traveling one, he contends, "whereas the time attributed by Peter to his own system is a time he has lived, the time he attributes to Paul's is neither a time that either Peter or Paul has lived, nor a time that Peter conceives as lived or as capable of being lived by a living, conscious Paul." Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*, trans. Leon Jacobson, ed. Robin Durie (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999), 52.

3. Augustine, *Confessions*, 2nd ed., trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 242.

4. According to Zeno's paradox of the flight of the arrow, at any instant of time the flying arrow must be where it is and not in motion, which means no motion is possible in time. In "The Unreality of Time," McTaggart claims that no event can be past, present, and future without contradiction. If we introduce temporal difference to avoid the contradiction (saying at one time the event is past, at another it is present, and at another it is future), we presuppose the very concept (time) that we are trying to explain. McTaggart further insists that the relational conception of time (which considers relations of earlier and later as real, rather than tenses) necessarily relies on the tensed conception. Objections to McTaggart that affirm the reality of time typically accept one of his arguments against it: either his critique of tensed time or his view that relational time depends of tensed time. See John McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," *Mind* 18 (1908): 457–74, and John McTaggart, "Time," in *The Nature of Existence*, vol. 2, ed. C. D. Broad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 9–31.

5. The attempt to foreground time also occurs in the politics of the twentieth century. Both Lenin and Mao's attempts to realize a communist society took the hope for the emergence of something completely new as their point of departure. This is why Lenin insisted, against Karl Kautsky, on the need for a violent revolution that would wipe clean the slate of bourgeois society, and why Mao in 1966 sided with the young Red Guards against the established communist power structure.

6. Though the attempt to shatter the subject's isolation and open it to otherness is visible in, say, British Romanticism, this attempt initially takes for granted the isolated subject that one must shatter. When William Wordsworth shows the connection between the poet and the other in "Tintern Abbey," he does not

call into question the primacy of the self that will make this connection. With twentieth century thought, this is what increasingly disappears.

7. Gérard Gennette claims that in Proust's narrative structure even the narrator's contemplation occurs in time and that this is a key part of the temporal revolution he helps to inaugurate. For Genette's classic analysis of Proust's handling of narrative time, see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980).

8. In *Understanding Space-Time*, Robert Disalle contends that in the light of Einstein's revolution, "[Newton's] conceptions are revealed to be local and incomplete. Special relativity 'contains' Newtonian space-time, for example, not merely by making the same predictions in a limiting case, but by revealing that what passes for absolute simultaneity is in fact a narrow and relative conception, mistakenly extended from a particular frame of reference to every inertial frame. Similarly, the argument for general relativity reveals the conception of inertial frame to be a purely local one, mistakenly extended to the global structure of space-time." Robert Disalle, *Understanding Space-Time: The Philosophical Development of Physics from Newton to Einstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 157.

9. Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 39.

10. D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 73.

11. Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 73.

12. When one identifies films, one often identifies them by the year in which they were made, the director who created them, the company that produced them, and their running times. This format testifies to the importance of temporality in the cinematic art as well as to the central role that industry plays.

13. The possibility of the live performance finally separates film from radio and television. In the early days of both radio and television, the live performance was the norm, and even as this norm has evanesced, it is occasionally resuscitated, as demonstrated by the live television remake of *Fail Safe* (Stephen Frears, 2000).

14. Though it may turn out to be the case that the revolution of the digital camera will have a deleterious effect on film production, there is no ontological difference between the *cinématographe* of the Lumière brothers and the most technologically advanced digital camera now available. Both produce a temporal experience of the visual image. The technological advantages of the digital camera—the ease and cost of shooting incredible amounts of footage, for instance—may lead toward unwieldy, self-indulgent films, but they may also lead to explorations of temporality unforeseen in the age of the analogue camera.

15. Peter Wollen, *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), 240. The temporality of the cinema does change when the spectator gains the ability to pause, rewind, or fast-forward the film, which occurs with the advent

of VCRs and DVD players. These technological advances threaten the temporal distinctiveness of the cinema and undoubtedly play a part in cinema's turn to atemporality.

16. One symptom of filmic temporality is the common reference of film reviewers to running time as a means of evaluation. The judgment of a film depends to some extent on how it makes use of our time. For reviewers, the length of a film is integral to its aesthetic worth, and even a potentially great film can become mediocre if it takes too much time. For instance, reviewer Desson Howe, agreeing with many others, appreciates James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) but laments how it squanders time. He proclaims, "the movie's too long. Who wrote the 11th Commandment that says epics should go on forever? *Titanic* is a good, often stunning movie caught in a three-and-a-half hour drift." Desson Howe, "*Titanic*'s Very Slow Leak," *Washington Post* (19 December 1997): http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/titanichowe.htm.

17. Traditional Hollywood cinema does not work to highlight the experience of temporality for the spectator; instead, the continuity editing practices of this cinema struggle against the temporality inherent in the cinematic apparatus itself. Such practices separate the spectator's experience of cinematic temporality into clearly isolatable moments that fit comfortably within an ideologically established narrative structure. In this way, traditional Hollywood cinema denies the spectator any awareness of the cinematic experience as the experience of an original temporality. As Mary Ann Doane notes in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, "Cinema comprises simultaneously the rationalization of time and an homage to contingency. Classical cinematic form involves the strict regulation of a mode that never ceases the spectator as open, fluid, malleable—the site of newness and difference itself." Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 32.

18. Deleuze contends, "The direct time-image is the phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom." Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 41.

19. As Kracauer puts it, "the cinema is conceivably animated by a desire to picture transient material life, life at its most ephemeral. Street crowds, involuntary gestures, and other fleeting impressions are its very meat." Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), xlix.

20. Bazin praises Italian Neorealism for its success in constituting an experience of temporality that challenges the hegemony of Hollywood's effacement of temporality. Describing Italian Neorealism, he notes, "it is perhaps especially the structure of the narrative which is most radically turned upside down. It must now respect the actual duration of the event. The cuts that logic demands can only be, at best, descriptive" (André Bazin, "De Sica: Metteur en Scène," in

What Is Cinema?, vol. 2, trans. Hugh Gray [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971], 65–66). Because it returns the cinema to its authentic temporality, Bazin contends that "neorealism is more an ontological position than an aesthetic one." Bazin, "De Sica: Metteur en Scène," 66.

21. Films that depict alternative realities or possibilities represent a related current cinematic mode. These films include *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howitt, 1998) and *Lola Rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, Tom Tykwer, 1998), and they tend to focus on the contingent events or characters' choices that create dramatically different results. The concern of these films is not so much a relationship to time as the exploration of the effects of a decisive moment or decisive moments.

22. The five films in the series are: *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968), *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (Ted Post, 1970), *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (Don Taylor, 1971), *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (J. Lee Thompson, 1972), and *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (J. Lee Thompson, 1973). There are two celebrated instances of time travel in the first two films: when George Taylor (Charlton Heston) and other astronauts are catapulted to an earth of the future controlled by apes, and when, in the sequel, Brent (James Franciscus) is sent to rescue Taylor and ends up in the same situation. But the most important distortion of cinematic time occurs at the beginning of the third film. The second film ends with a nuclear holocaust that destroys the earth, but the third film reveals that two apes escape the destruction in a spaceship that hurdles them backward in time to the era when humans controlled the planet. As a result, the last three films depict a development of ape life that ends with humans and apes living in harmony, effectively rendering the events of the first two films impossible. Time, as the series conceives it, can be rewritten on top of itself.

23. Despite the presence of nonlinear stories in Lynch's films, one could still imagine their inclusion in the chapters that follow as instances of atemporal cinema because Lynch's formal experiments with time go beyond the demands of the nonlinear stories. Their absence is explained more by the fact that I have exhausted what I have to say about Lynch's work than by their inappropriateness. For the analysis that led to this exhaustion, see Todd McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). The exclusion of science fiction films and David Lynch also follows from the taxonomy of alternative plot films established by Charles Ramirez Berg. In his helpful essay, Berg excludes Lynch's films not because a jumbled story drives the jumbled filmic discourse but because Berg classifies these films as experimental cinema. For the complete list of alternative plots and their description, see Charles Ramirez Berg, "A Taxonomy of Alternative Plots in Recent Films," *Film Criticism* 31, no. 1–2 (2006): 5–61.

24. Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 372.

25. Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans.

and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 122. Throughout the standard edition, James Strachey translates *Trieb* as "instinct" rather than as "drive," which has contributed to a biological misunderstanding of Freud's idea.

26. There have been attempts to marry psychoanalysis with a philosophy of temporality, though Jean Laplanche advances the most compelling. He claims that the drive involves repetition only after a first temporal encounter with otherness. He notes, "right at the start, there is something that goes in the direction of the past to the future, from the other to the individual in question, that is in the direction from the adult to the baby, which I call the implantation of the enigmatic message. This message is then retranslated, following a temporal direction which is, in an alternating fashion, by turns retrogressive and progressive." Jean Laplanche, "Notes on Afterwardsness," in *Essays on Otherness* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 265.

27. Yuval Dolev, *Time and Realism: Metaphysical and Antimetaphysical Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 188.

28. The two dominant positions in contemporary analytic philosophy of time identify time as either tensed or tenseless. For the former, both the so-called A-series (past, present, and future) and B-series (earlier, simultaneous, and later) are real, while for the latter, only the B-series has an ontologically valid status.

29. Russell formulates a version of atemporal ethics, though he sees it as a theoretical attitude rather than a practical one. The requirement of the drive that we think atemporally, in contrast, is practical, not theoretical. Atemporality changes one's practical relation to one's object, which is an attitude that Russell never grasps as a possibility. Because he lacks the psychoanalytic conception of the drive, he cannot conceive of practical desire divorced from temporality. He says, "Past and future must be acknowledged to be as real as the present, and a certain emancipation for slavery to time is essential to philosophic thought. The importance of time is rather practical than theoretical, rather in relation to our desires than in relation to truth." Bertrand Russell, "Mysticism and Logic," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921), 21.

30. Kant does not locate freedom directly in the noumenal self but in the split between the phenomenal and noumenal selves. If we confined ourselves to one or the other, there would be no freedom, as Kant sees it.

31. Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), 169.

32. A. N. Prior, "Thank Goodness That's Over," *Philosophy* 34 (1959): 17. Tenseless philosophers have pointed out the flaws in Prior's argument and tried to show that the feeling of relief is in fact compatible with a purely relational conception of time in which the experience of later coincides with relief. See Nathan L. Oaklander, "Thank Goodness It's Over," in *The Ontology of Time* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004), 211–13.

33. For a complete elaboration of the drive as an ethical position, see Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan* (New York: Verso, 2000).

34. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 80.

35. Despite the debt that Alain Badiou owes to psychoanalysis (and specifically Lacan), his ethical philosophy moves in the opposite direction from an ethics of the drive. For Badiou, the subject becomes ethical through its break from an obsession with traumatic loss and its fidelity to an event that produces something new. Trauma in this vision functions as a barrier to ethics because it justifies present actions as the rectification of the trauma. This is why Badiou makes the controversial assertion that the only possible solution to the crisis in the Middle East lies in forgetting the Holocaust. This is not, as his many detractors have asserted, an anti-Semitic statement but rather one rooted in an ethics of the new. In contrast, an ethics of the drive would see all attempts to justify current violence by recourse to the trauma of the Holocaust as a failure to see the inescapable nature of trauma. Settlements on the West Bank do not occur because the Holocaust counts for too much in the actions of Israel, but because its trauma doesn't count enough and is viewed as completely unrelated to any structural or ontological trauma. The great work on the relationship between the Holocaust and structural trauma is Paul Eisenstein, *Traumatic Encounters: Holocaust Representation and the Hegelian Subject* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

36. The first and last scenes of *Code Unknown* depict deaf children playing charades, and these scenes are exceptional insofar as they do have cuts. But they exist apart from the story depicted in the film, like a prologue and an epilogue.

37. The cut to the black screen functions like the psychoanalytic short session used by Jacques Lacan. Rather than conducting sessions of regular length, Lacan would abruptly put an end to sessions in order to create significance through an act of punctuating a particular moment or word. The idea of the short session emerges out of Lacan's belief that punctuation is the key to significance because it puts a stop to the sliding of the signifier.

38. The idea that time is the counting of movement appears as early as Aristotle, who notes, "We apprehend time only when we have marked motion, marking it by before and after; and it is only when we have perceived before and after in motion that we say that time has elapsed." Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R. P. Hardi and R. K. Gaye, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 371.

39. Though Einstein's revolution gives time a more prominent position in the calculations of physics, he never alters the basic conception of time. Time for Einstein is always the time of the clock.

40. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingston (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968).

41. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1993), 399–400.

42. Heidegger and Bergson differ in their assessments of where and when the spatialization of time occurs. According to Heidegger, Bergson wrongly attributes the spatialization of time to Aristotle and thus impugns his attempt to construct a corrective with the idea of *durée* or duration. In his 1927 lecture series *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (which represents his most complete discussion of temporality), Heidegger argues, "the Aristotelian concept of time was misunderstood in the modern period, especially by Bergson; from the outset he took [the] dimensional character in the sense of spatial extension in reference to its motion." Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 242.

43. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2001), 231–32.

44. The degradation of the analogue recording allows listeners to feel as if they are really there at the past event. The degradation communicates pastness as such. Don DeLillo makes this point through a discussion of the Bobby Thomson home run that won the 1951 National League pennant for the New York Giants in his masterpiece *Underworld*. One of the characters in the novel says, "The Thomson homer continues to live because it happened decades ago when things were not replayed and worn out and run down and used up before midnight of the first day. The scratchier an old film or an audiotape, the clearer the action in a way." Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 98.

45. The very existence of the term "real time," which is of recent vintage, indicates more forcefully the full spatialization of time. When one experiences, for instance, updates in real time, one is not subject to the delay inherent in temporality itself. Real time is the conquest of time.

46. Consumption represents at once the strong point and the weak point within capitalist relations of production. It is where those whose interest doesn't lie in the socioeconomic structure nonetheless invest themselves in the structure, but it is also where those who benefit from the structure are most vulnerable. As Kojin Karatani notes in his magisterial *Transcritique on Kant and Marx*, "Those who sell their labor-power commodity have no other choice but to be passive; yet again there is an exception in the structure: this is a topos where workers appear to be the subject—the place where the products of capitalist production are sold. This is the place of *consumption*. This is the only position where workers can stand as buyers, with their own money" (Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique on Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003], 288). For a worker, the capitalist holds all the cards, but for the consumer, the situation is reversed. Rather than abasing myself in order to appeal to the capitalist, the capitalist must appeal to me. Karatani adds, "workers as the other—the one who capital can never subsume—appear as consumers. It follows that the class struggle against capitalism must be a transnational movement of workers qua consumers or consumers qua workers" (Karatani, *Transcritique on Kant and Marx*, 294). On the level of consumption, the stability of capitalism appears in question in a way that it doesn't from the perspective of production.

47. Just because psychoanalysis is an inherently anticonsumer practice does not mean that one cannot treat it as an object of consumption, as often occurs with both analysts and analysands.

48. Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 8. Stewart's definition of postfilmic cinema—films that distort time and space through their narrative structure or their content—is considerably broader than my conception of atemporal cinema. He includes films such as *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) and *Frequency* (Gregory Hoblit, 2000), in which the temporal dislocations derive from the generic possibilities of science fiction rather than from the development of an atemporal narrative structure.

1. Temporality after the End of Time in *Pulp Fiction*

1. Liberating time from chronology and measurement is the project of the final section of *Being and Time*. There, Heidegger argues that the clock creates a public idea of time as a series of instants that disguises the prior temporality of Dasein that makes the sense of time possible. Rather than allowing us to access and understand time, the clock obscures our own authentic temporality. Heidegger notes, "in *measuring time*, time gets *made public* in such a way that it is encountered in each case and at each time for everyone as 'now and now and now.' This time 'universally' accessible in clocks is found as an *objectively present multiplicity of nows*, so to speak, though time measurement is not directed thematically toward time as such." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 383.

2. Steven Soderbergh's *The Limey* (1999) presents the disruptiveness of time in a different way. Rather than depicting events occurring in a nonchronological order, Soderbergh overlaps the dialogue of scenes in the film, so that the spectator hears what happens in the next scene before seeing it. This creates the sense that the future intrudes on the present, which is a function of our status as temporal beings.

3. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 30.

4. In her trenchant critique of Neo-Spinozism, Kiarina Kordela argues that what the Neo-Spinozists see as the revolutionary transformation of capitalism is in fact just the further development of capitalism. She asks rhetorically, "in what, then, does the revolutionary 'telos of the multitude' differ from the *telos* of capital itself?" A. Kiarina Kordela, *$urplus: Spinoza, Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 4.

5. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2004), 33.

6. Hardt and Negri's utopian vision of the future brought by the overthrow of contemporary global capitalism—what they call Empire—bespeaks their investment in temporality and the radicality that follows from its embrace.

They proclaim, "The cities of the earth will become at once great deposits of cooperating humanity and locomotives for circulation, temporary residences and networks of the mass distribution of living humanity." Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 397.

7. Dana Polan, *Pulp Fiction* (London: BFI, 2000), 27–28.

8. When Jules and Vincent first arrive at the door of the apartment where they will perform the hit, Jules looks at his watch and says that it is not yet the right time. They walk to the end of the hall and continue their discussion for a few minutes, and then they return to the door. The film never makes clear why Jules and Vincent needed to wait a few minutes before entering. (One might guess it is because of an arrangement that Jules had made with the man he knows in the apartment, but this could only be a guess.) Tarantino leaves the reason ambiguous, yet includes the delay in order to accentuate the temporal dimension of what occurs. The spectator continually encounters reminders of time throughout the film.

9. Whereas Gilles Deleuze conceives of the repetition as disguising otherness beneath the mask of sameness, the psychoanalytic idea of repetition—which I take up throughout this chapter and the entire book—is that repetition disguises sameness beneath the guise of the different forms that it adopts. This is why one cannot reconcile Deleuze's position with that of psychoanalysis, even when his early thought makes direct reference to Freud.

10. In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume rejects the notion of a continuity of a stable self existing over time, and when he does so, he understands that he must erect something in its place in order to save morality. As Hume sees it, morality depends on a chronological sense of time in which we can connect past, present, and future in some way, even if one rejects the continuity of the self. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

11. I was myself initially seduced by the moral reading, and it took the students from my summer 2007 graduate seminar on contemporary atemporal cinema to convince me out of this position. They dealt it the final blow by showing how the moral reading cannot account for the way that the form of the film allocates the spectator's pleasure. Thus, I owe this point in the analysis of the film to Siling Zhou, Cynthia Tighe, Tim Reimer, Adam Cottrel, Dan Clarke, and Michael Blouin.

12. One of the key traits that *Pulp Fiction* shares with most of the other films of atemporal cinema is its seduction of the spectator into an initial misleading interpretation. In each case, the misinterpretation is a necessary step on the path to a proper interpretation. In the majority of the other films, the misinterpretation results from the spectator's investment in the ameliorative power of time; in *Pulp Fiction*, it derives from a failure to recognize the nature and fecundity of temporality. This strategy is a staple of Tarantino's films, even when they do follow a chronological plot structure.

13. If *Pulp Fiction* took the side of Jules and presented the chance event as a genuine miracle, it would be an entirely different film. The miracle, as Alain Badiou conceives it, marks a point of rupture within time—a point that cannot be reduced to the quotidian order of being because it partakes of the eternal. As a militant atheist, Badiou views the miracle in secular terms, but he nonetheless insists on its distinct ontological status—or, more properly, its distinction from all ontology. For Tarantino, in contrast, the miraculous is time itself and thus cannot be separated from being. In his masterful critique of Gilles Deleuze, Badiou contrasts the two positions. He says, "Time is for me a category derived from presentation as such, and it is in itself multiple. I would state that time (or rather *a* time—that of the situation) is the being-*not-there* of the concept. A truth is always the undoing of a time, just as a revolution is the end of an epoch. It is therefore essential for me that truth be thought, not as time or as the intemporal being of time, but as *interruption*." Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 64.

14. Kevin Howley, "Breaking, Making, and Killing Time in *Pulp Fiction*," *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and TV Studies* (May 2004): http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue = may2004&id = 251&section = article.

15. bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 48.

16. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 20.

17. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 21. Deleuze depicts the struggle between the cliché and the image an epic battle for the fate of civilization. He says, "In fact, it is a civilization of the cliché where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us, not necessarily in hiding the same thing from us, but in hiding something in the image. On the other hand, at the same time, the image constantly attempts to break through the cliché, to get out of the cliché. There is no knowing how far a real image may lead: the importance of becoming visionary or seer." Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 21.

18. The sense of the familiar becomes even more pronounced in Tarantino's later films, like the two volumes of *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004) or *Death Proof* (2007). But these films emphasize less the ability of the familiar to give rise to the new than does *Pulp Fiction*. Because of the way that it thematizes time, *Pulp Fiction* stretches the familiar to a greater extent than any of Tarantino's other films.

19. The prominent place of the MacGuffin in *Pulp Fiction* is apropos considering the film's investment in temporality. The content of the MacGuffin is unimportant, yet it motivates the action within the film. As a device, the MacGuffin bears the mark of a temporal nonidentity. Like all temporal entities, the MacGuffin never simply is what it is. As Alfred Hitchcock himself tells François Truffaut, "You may be wondering where the term originated. It might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men in a train. One man says, 'What's that package up there in the baggage rack?' And the other answers, 'Oh, that's a MacGuffin.' The first one asks, 'What's a MacGuffin?' 'Well,' the other man says, 'it's an

apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands.' The first man says, 'But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands,' and the other one answers, 'Well then, that's no MacGuffin!' So you see that a MacGuffin is actually nothing at all." Alfred Hitchcock, in François Truffaut, *Hitchcock: The Definitive Study of Alfred Hitchcock by François Truffaut*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 138.

20. The ability to escape from a seemingly sealed fate becomes even more pronounced in another film by cowriter of *Pulp Fiction* Roger Avary. His *Killing Zoe* (1994) ends with the main character Zed (Eric Stoltz) trapped in a bank that he and others are trying to rob. The police surround the bank, and the only possibilities appear to be death or capture by the police. But the events in the film permit Zed to make a miraculous escape that nevertheless remains believable.

21. Many reviewers of *I'm Not There* have noted that enjoying the film requires knowledge of Dylan's life because the disjointed portrait of that life makes sense only when armed with this prior knowledge. But although knowledge of Dylan's life might make the viewing experience more pleasurable, it actually undermines the purpose of the film by providing a way for the spectator to normalize the events as they are depicted on the screen. Yet one must know Dylan well enough to grasp the nature of each distortion. The fundamental problem with *I'm Not There* is that the ideal spectator must have no knowledge of Dylan's life and an in-depth knowledge of it at the same time. That is to say, the ideal spectator of the film is an impossible one. It permits no proper position of spectatorship.

22. Tarantino shares the idea of repetition that Deleuze advances in *Difference and Repetition*. According to Deleuze, "In every respect, repetition is a transgression. It puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality." Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3.

23. The story of the watch stored in the anus of Captain Koons marks another instance in which time becomes important within the content of the film. It testifies to the fundamental intrusiveness of time, which, as the film sees it, penetrates into all aspects of our being. It intrudes on, as Koons's story suggests, our anal attempts to contain its generative power. Later, Butch's return to his apartment to retrieve this same watch leads to the violent encounters with Vincent, Marsellus, and the rapists at the Mason-Dixon Pawn Shop, where we again see outbreaks of anality in the form of anal rape. Many critics have attacked the film's depiction of gay sex, but this depiction cannot be dissociated from its embrace of temporal productivity. For the partisan of the production of the new, anality will always seem like an effort to restrain and control the danger of productivity.

24. Fiona A. Villella, "Circular Narratives: Highlights of Popular Cinema in the '90s," *Senses of Cinema* (January 2000): http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/3/circular.html.

25. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 163. In her elaboration of the theoretical foundation for the process of resignification, Butler provides an almost precise description of how this process works in *Pulp Fiction*. She says, "The force and meaning of an utterance are not exclusively determined by prior contexts or 'positions'; an utterance may gain its force precisely by virtue of the break with context that it performs. Such breaks with prior context or, indeed, with ordinary usage, are crucial to the political operation of the performative. Language takes on a non-ordinary meaning in order precisely to contest what has become sedimented in and as the ordinary." Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 145.

26. Though there were many others, Denzel Washington and Spike Lee were two of the most prominent critics of Tarantino for the treatment of race in his films.

27. Sharon Willis, *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 207.

28. Although Tarantino's attempt at resignification fails, the substitution of inoffensive terms for offensive ones is also doomed to fail as long as the enjoyment attached to the act of enunciation remains. The word "Jew" can embody just as much obscene anti-Semitic enjoyment as the word "kike."

29. As Lev Manovitch puts it, "The logic of replacement, characteristic of cinema, gives way to the logic of addition and coexistence. Time becomes spatialized, distributed over the surface of the screen. In spatial montage, nothing needs to be forgotten, nothing is erased. Just as we use computers to accumulate endless texts, messages, notes, and data, and just as a person, going through life, accumulates more and more memories, with the past slowly acquiring more weight than the future, spatial montage can accumulate events and images and it progresses through its narrative. In contrast to the cinema's screen, which primarily functions as a record of perception, here the computer screen functions as a record of memory." Lev Manovitch, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 325.

2. Not the Worst of All Possible Worlds

1. The most traditional aspect of the distortion of temporality that occurs in *Butterfly Effect* is the flashback that commences at the beginning of the film and lasts for almost the entire running time. Through the use of this initial flashback, Bress and Gruber provide a hint of the form that film's more radical distortions will subsequently take.

2. *Butterfly Effect* takes from psychoanalysis the idea that traumatic events are blank spaces within the narrative that makes up our lives and implements this idea formally. The traumatic events shape the lives of Evan and his friends to such an extent that, even though they are initially not present in the narrative, they determine the direction of the narrative. As Evan recognizes, any substantive change in his life must involve intervening in these events.

3. Lacan never theorizes das Ding and the objet petit a at the same time in his seminars and thus never himself makes clear their relationship to each other. It is as if Lacan himself must theoretically transition from the former to the latter in the way that the analysand—and Evan in *Butterfly Effect*—does. Lacan first conceives of das Ding in his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis in 1959–1960 and then provides his first sustained theorization of the objet petit a in his seminar on anxiety in 1962–1963. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1992), and Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre X: L'angoisse, 1962–1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

4. Insisting that other worlds are possible allows Leibniz to claim that they aren't desirable, that they are less perfect than the world we inhabit. In this way, the idea of the alternative helps to accommodate us to the world that we have. He notes that "although God certainly always chooses the best, that does not stop something less perfect from being and remaining possible in itself, even though it will not happen—for it is not its impossibility but its imperfection which makes him reject it." G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Philosophical Texts*, trans. and eds. R. S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65.

5. The phrase "another world is possible" appears in many different arenas of contemporary politics and is not uniquely associated with a single leftist organization or party. It is, for instance, the name of a collection of essays recounting the 2002 World Social Forum and the motto for the Third World Network.

6. Marx's critique of utopian socialism is that it provides the image of progress while actually functioning in a conservative way to dissolve the understanding of history. The vision of utopian socialists is one of an impossible world—a world with no chance to emerge out of the ruling historical conditions. Marx counters with a utopianism based on a possible world: his vision of a communist future exists as one possibility toward which capitalist conditions of production point.

7. The key political question that psychoanalysis engenders is whether a political project that recognizes the illusory nature of the good is possible. It is easy to envision a politics, like that of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, that establishes the good as impossible to achieve, but it is much more difficult to envision one that eliminates the category of the good altogether. *Butterfly Effect* attempts to provide the contours of such a political project.

8. In his *Seminar VII*, Lacan describes the process of the creation of desirability in similar but slightly different terms. Lacan argues that what he calls creation ex nihilo occurs not so much through an original loss but through the creation of a hole or an emptiness that forms the basis of the subject's sublime Thing. The emptiness becomes the ultimate source of the subject's capacity for enjoyment.

9. Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology After Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 247.

10. Lacan, *Seminar VII*, 70.

11. The self-destructiveness that undermines societies and individual subjects alike represents an effort to stave off this absolute ruin that would arrive with the achievement of the good. In this sense, the sabotaging of our interests works to preserve our subjectivity.

12. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 21.

13. This is a point made by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. They contend that capitalism cannot survive if it offers the subject nothing other than pure insatiability. According to their analysis, "whereas capitalism, by its very nature, is an insatiable process, people are satiable, so that they require justifications for getting involved in an insatiable process. It follows that capitalism cannot make do with offering nothing more specific than its inherent insatiability." Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2005), 486.

14. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 386.

15. As I have noted earlier, for Heidegger, the danger of the vulgar interpretation of time lies not in its tendency to obfuscate repetition but in the way that it externalizes and objectifies temporality. As an objective and external fact of the world, time loses its constitutive status for Dasein as a being-in-the-world, and Dasein therefore becomes inauthentic, out of touch with the real conditions of its existence.

16. The film depicts other moments outside the three fundamental ones—such as Evan's visit with his father in an institution, when his father attacks him—but these moments, though linked to trauma for Evan, do not shape him in a fundamental way as the three key moments do.

17. The depictions of Evan's return to past traumas have the precise structure of fantasy. Evan relives the past as a fully conscious agent because he has an impossible double perspective on the events: he is both a third-party witness observing the scene and an actor within it. The enjoyment that fantasy provides stems directly from the subject's ability to occupy these two positions simultaneously without being derailed by the contradiction involved.

18. As Jean Laplanche makes clear in his attempt to think through *Nachträglichkeit*, the subject's encounter with the Other produces a zigzagging temporal structure. Every return to the past trauma entails a movement forward, and every movement forward entails a return to the past trauma.

19. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 56.

20. At the end of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud proclaims his refusal to write his own version of "Paradise Regained." He says, "I have not the courage

to rise up before my fellow-men as a prophet, and I bow to their reproach that I can offer them no consolation: for at bottom that is what they are all demanding—the wildest revolutionaries no less passionately than the most virtuous believers." Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 145.

21. Evan's efforts throughout *Butterfly Effect* to create a perfect world by returning to past traumas and altering his behavior in them mirror almost precisely the strategies of ego-building therapy. Though no one believes that subjects can actually change past events, such therapy does have the goal of changing the events by changing the subject's relationship to them. By confronting events of childhood with the mindset of an adult, one creates a new experience without the previous trauma. In contrast, psychoanalysis, properly speaking, functions in the manner of Evan's final intervention: it returns to the past in order to allow the subject to explore and ultimately embrace its constitutive trauma rather than to move beyond it.

22. As Juan-David Nasio points out, there are different forms of suicide. Though what he calls the "suicide-act" successfully breaks from the symbolic coordinates that would define it, the question always concerns where the subject locates enjoyment. The suicide-act or the symbolic suicide manages to identify with the Other's enjoyment rather than continuing to posit it elsewhere, as Evan does in the directors' cut of *Butterfly Effect*. According to Nasio, "A suicide-act . . . is a suicide where the subject takes the step and effectively crosses the threshold of the Other enjoyment." Juan-David Nasio, *Le Fantasme* (Paris: Éditions Payot and Rivages, 2005), 58 (my translation).

23. Like *Butterfly Effect*, *Donnie Darko* is a film in which the director's cut departs significantly from the theatrical release. But the changes in the latter film do not alter its overall idea in the way that the changes in the former do. Kelly uses the director's version of *Donnie Darko* primarily to provide philosophical speculation concerning what happens to Donnie and to fill in the roles of secondary characters. There is considerably more critical dispute about the two versions of *Donnie Darko*, with some finding that the director's cut dampens the impact of the film by explaining too much.

24. One can imagine celebrating the directors' cut as the radical vision that could not get past Hollywood's contemporary system of censorship and condemning the theatrical release as a compromise with economic exigencies. This is the position taken up not only by the film's directors themselves but also by most critics who comment on the film. Garrett Stewart, for instance, claims that the directors' original ending was "too disturbing and thus reshot." Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 153.

25. The contrast between the final images of the theatrical release and the directors' cut indicate the departure from the idea of the good in the former and the investment in this idea in the latter. The theatrical release depicts a failed

encounter; the directors' cut shows a series of successes not undercut by any sense of failure or absence. The intervention of studio executives to censor the directors' disturbing ending in order to make it more palatable for a mainstream audience had the ironic effect of radicalizing the film.

3. Eternity without Sunshine

1. Raymond Bellour, "To Alternate/To Narrate (on *The Lonedale Operator*)," trans. Inge Pruks, revised by Roxanne Lapidus, in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 277.

2. Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 88.

3. The romantic union provides a precise narrative parallel to the way that the psychoanalytic film theory of the 1970s and 1980s sees the cinematic apparatus functioning ideologically. According to this theory, the very structure of the apparatus assures spectators that they can overcome their experience of absence or lack through the presence of the image. In the act of viewing the cinematic image, the spectator experiences it as complete in itself. The plenitude of the cinematic image obscures the absence inherent in the process of filmic signification. Though every signifying process creates meaning through absence, in the cinema we see the fullness of the image rather than the absence implicit in the frame and structures of signification. The cinematic signifier is imaginary not just because it communicates in images, but because it hides the absence that its very process of signification requires and presents us with the illusion of total presence. As a result, cinematic experience is an experience of illusory completeness, and the cinema seduces us insofar as it promises this experience. Or, to put it another way, we see story at the expense of discourse—story that seems to exist without discursive moments of enunciation. As Christian Metz puts it, "the cinematic signifier does not work on its own account but is employed entirely to remove the traces of its own steps, to open immediately to the transparency of a signified, of a story, which is in reality manufactured by it but which it pretends merely to 'illustrate,' to transmit to us after the event, as if it had existed previously." Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 40.

4. The important role of the Lacuna technique in *Eternal Sunshine* does not throw the film into the realm of speculative science fiction. In fact, researchers have already developed pharmacological methods for eliminating traumatic memories in mice. In contrast to the film's vision of this type of treatment, the real Lacuna procedure will undoubtedly come in a pill form.

5. The cover of the DVD version of the film and most advertising posters for it include the image of Joel and Clementine lying on the ice next to a large crack. It serves as the defining image of the film in the promotional materials.

6. What appears as forward movement in the Hegelian dialectic is really nothing but this recognition of the enabling power of failure. One advances when one sees the success implicit in what one formerly perceived as a failure. As Hegel famously puts it in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "The life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins to its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.

7. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient, 1957–1958*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 19 (my translation).

8. Though *Shadows and Fog* does conclude with the image of the romantic union, it also insists on the power of time to uproot every stable form, including the romantic union. The power of time is hinted at even in the scene where Irmy and Kleinman are looking at the stars together. Just after Irmy affirms the perfection of the moment, Kleinman draws attention to its fleeting nature. He tells her, "Yes, but, you know, it passes so quickly. Look, even now the fog is starting to go back in, and, you know, everything's always moving all the time. You know, everything's constantly in motion, so it's no wonder I'm nauseous." The film itself affirms Kleinman's insistence of giving time the last word: the concluding romantic union represents a moment of perfection, but it is clear that this perfection can only be momentary. In this sense, *Shadows and Fog* represents a cinematic counterpart to *Eternal Sunshine*. The latter film imbues the romantic union with repetition; the former submits it to time. In opposite ways, they sustain the romantic union and at the same time subvert the form that it traditionally takes in order to reverse its ideological power. But as *Shadows and Fog* implicitly conceives it, the romantic union would work out if it were not for the destructiveness of time, which be speaks a continued investment in the ideal of a nonantagonistic union. (Andrew Barnaby [University of Vermont] pointed out the contrast between the two films to me.)

9. I am indebted to Michelle Karnes (Stanford University) for this point.

10. Steven Soderbergh's *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009) similarly uses an atemporal structure to emphasize the priority of antagonism. At the end of the film, Chelsea (Sasha Grey), a prostitute for the rich, violates her own rules of the trade and falls for a client who seems different from all the others. Rather than depicting the initial chemistry between Chelsea and the client and subsequently revealing the client's decision to return to his spouse, Soderbergh shows the traumatic rejection occurring first. The sensitive and understanding client appears only after his devastating betrayal. As a result, the antagonism between prostitute and client informs the seemingly complementary bond that they forge.

11. As a result of its wholly negative portrayal of the relationship, *5x2* ironically becomes a film too optimistic about romantic unions. The failure of the relationship between Marion and Gilles can serve only as a negative example of

how a relationship can go wrong. As a result, it doesn't reveal how antagonism animates even those relationships that go right, as *Eternal Sunshine* does.

12. In his seminar on anxiety, Jacques Lacan departs from the philosophical tradition and associates anxiety with the overpresence of the privileged object rather than with an experience of absence. He notes, "What is most anxiety-provoking for the child is precisely when the relationship on which he sets himself up, the relationship which makes him desire, is disrupted; it is the most disrupted when there is no possibility of lack, when the mother is all the time on his back, and especially when she is wiping his ass, which is the model of the demand that cannot fail." Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre X: L'angoisse, 1962–1963*, 67 (my translation).

13. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre IX: L'identification, 1961–1962*, unpublished manuscript, session of 21 February, 1962 (my translation).

14. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 207.

15. For Sartre, such absolute freedom could not exist. As he conceives it, freedom is nothing but the act of leaving one's past behind. This is why Sartre could never reconcile his thought with psychoanalysis, despite the effort he put forth in this direction. For Sartre, no matter how determinative it might be, "I radically transcend my past toward the future to the same extent that I 'was it.'" Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 208.

16. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 309.

17. Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 15.

18. Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology After Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 208.

19. Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 150.

20. Alexander Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," in *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, vol. 2, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 207–10.

21. Mary's professed love for quotations is appropriate for an employee of the Lacuna Corporation. Lacuna treats the human mind in the same way that the book of quotations treats the literary work: rather than an interconnected whole, the mind or the literary work consists, according to this view, of discrete sections. Thus, one can extract a particular section without considering the whole. But this failure to consider the whole—the links between the extracted section and the rest of the structure—leads to the failure of the project itself. The book of quotations reproduces lines that might mean the opposite of what they seem to mean in isolation; memory erasure causes traumas to repeat rather than eliminating them.

22. Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," 222, 223–28.

23. The final lines of the poem rule out any identification of Pope with the virgin rather than with Eloisa. Eloisa says, "And sure, if fate some future Bard shall join / In sad similitude of griefs to mine, / Condemn'd whole years in absence to deplore, / And image charms he must behold no more, / Such if there be, who loves so long, so well; / Let him our sad, our tender story tell; / The well-sung woes will soothe my pensive ghost; / He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most" (Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," 359–66). The image here is one of the poet (Pope) loving in the same way as Eloisa and Abelard, and it is this love that enables him to recount their relationship. (Jonathan Mulrooney [Holy Cross] suggested this to me.)

24. Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 187.

25. Mary adopts the position often wrongly associated with psychoanalysis. But even Freud himself sometimes falls into the trap of seeing the goal of the analytic experience as the conquest of the unconscious by consciousness. For instance, in the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, he says, "What we make use of must no doubt be the replacing of what is unconscious by what is conscious, the translation of what is unconscious into what is conscious. Yes, that is it. By carrying what is unconscious on into what is conscious, we lift the repressions, the preconditions for the formation of symptoms, we transform the pathogenic conflict into a normal one for which it must be possible somehow to find a solution." Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 16, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), 435.

26. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 268.

27. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 269.

28. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xii.

29. D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 128.

30. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1998), 46.

4. The Path to Politics in *The Constant Gardener*

1. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 302. Despite the seemingly pejorative tone that Heidegger uses when discussing the They, he often insists that he is not formulating a moral judgment. He believes that Dasein's fall into the They (and its idle talk, its curiosity, its ambiguity) is not simply an unfortunate event that befalls certain beings. This fall is necessary for the structure of Dasein as such. In this way, Heidegger expresses a belief, articulated directly by Louis Althusser approximately 40 years later, that ideology has no history, that it is eternal.

2. In the posthumously culled together *Heideggerian Marxism*, Herbert Marcuse attempts to trace the political implications of Heidegger's thought. The experience of authentic temporality, as Marcuse sees it, creates the possibility of a radical politicization. He says, "It is precisely knowledge of historicity that leads to the most momentous decision: the decision either to struggle for the recognized necessity, even against Dasein's own inherited existence, or to remain in necessarily fallen forms of existence." Herbert Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism," in *Heideggerian Marxism*, eds. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 23.

3. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 389.

4. For Heidegger personally, the attempt to exist in an authentic temporality led him to turn away from politics, which he saw as the terrain of struggle largely resistant to authentic activity. But this avoidance does not follow from his own philosophy of temporality. The famous departure from the policy of nonengagement—taking up the Nazi cause in 1933—thus represents the one moment when Heidegger tried to live up to the dignity of his thought, which is why Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Žižek, and others can see something positive in the turn toward Nazism.

5. After Tessa's death, Justin learns the truth of her fidelity in two waves. In a conversation with Tessa's friend Ghita Pearson (Archie Panjabi), he discovers that Arnold was gay and thus not Tessa's lover. Later, while searching Tessa's computer files with her cousin and lawyer Arthur "Ham" Hammond (Richard McCabe) and his son Guido (Rupert Simonian), he finally uncovers the groundlessness of all his suspicions.

6. Africa is not the sole, or even the favored, location for this type of film. Central America and East Asia are the privileged spots for Western individuals to find their true selves through a region's political turmoil. See, for instance, Peter Weir's *Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), Roger Spottiswoode's *Under Fire* (1983), Oliver Stone's *Salvador* (1986), and John Boorman's *Beyond Rangoon* (1995).

7. The retroactive transformation of an apparent romantic signification into a political one also occurs when Justin overhears Tessa complain to Arnold, "It's almost as if it's a marriage of convenience, and all it's going to produce is dead offspring." Hearing this just after their death of their baby, Justin assumes—as does the spectator—that she is referring to their relationship. But after her death, a conversation with Ham reveals to Justin that Tessa used the phrase "marriage of convenience" to refer to the relationship between two companies, KDH (which makes the Tuberculosis drug Dypraxa) and Three Bees (which tests it).

8. In *No Future*, Lee Edelman equates politics with the reign of the symbolic and the avoidance of the drive. When we politicize ourselves, according to Edelman, we opt for symbolic possibilities—we invest ourselves in the hope for a distinctly symbolic future—rather than acceding to the constitutive negativity on

which they inevitably run aground. He says, "we might rather, figuratively, cast our vote for 'none of the above,' for the primacy of a constant *no* in response to the law of the Symbolic, which would echo that law's foundational act, its self-constituting negation. The structuring optimism of politics to which the order of meaning commits us, installing as it does the perpetual hope of reaching meaning through signification, is always, I would argue, a negation of this primal, constitutive, and negative act" (Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004], 5). Although one might agree entirely with Edelman's claim here as an indictment of politics as it is typically practiced, it misses the existence of a politics of the impossible, a politics of the drive oriented around the act for which the symbolic structure cannot account. Such an act involves the repetition of the "self-constituting negation" that founds the symbolic structure and has a political status precisely because it goes beyond all symbolic accounting. (I am indebted to Valerie Rohy [University of Vermont] for pointing out this contrast to me.)

9. In "On the Concept of History," Walter Benjamin distinguishes between a real state of emergency and a "state of emergency"—a declaration made by symbolic authorities in order to contain the possible eruption of the real state of emergency. The real state of emergency, for Benjamin, disallows the possibility of measuring history in terms of progress. See Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

10. The idea of sexual difference is integral to the political force of the psychoanalytic project. Though abandoning sexual difference in favor of a unisexual approach might seem like a politically progressive act, it would have the effect of eliminating the possibility of theorizing the opposition to ideology. The challenge against ideology has its origin in identification with an absence or with the missing piece in the social structure. This absence does not exist for the subject who has the phallic signifier as a point of identification, and without sexual difference, there would be only such subjects.

11. Kenneth Reinhard explains the difference between masculine and feminine subjectivity in this way: "Unlike the case of men, for whom there *is* a unified category, 'all men,' that they are identified as being members of, women are *radically singular*, not examples of a class or members of a closed set, but *each one an exception*." Kenneth Reinhard, "Toward a Political Theology of the Neighbor," in Slavoj Žižek, Eric Santner, Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 58.

12. Despite what one might imagine, the logic of incompletion, while rejecting the possibility of the whole, is correlative to universalizing. Universalizing permits the singular—the series of exceptions that constitute the incomplete—to emerge. In order to arrive at universality (in contrast to generality, which does follow a masculine logic of the whole), one must introduce what doesn't fit—the absolutely singular. For more on the distinction between universality and

generality, see Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique on Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

13. Of course, not all (and not only) women take up the subjectivity of incompletion, but in the figure of Tessa, we glimpse the possibility of doing so.

14. In response to the many critiques of psychoanalysis demanding the reason for the association of incompletion with female subjectivity, Colette Soler rejects this entire line of questioning. She notes, "It is meaningless to ask why discourse imputes to women the choice of lining themselves up on the side of the 'not at all' (*pas du tout*), a choice that makes them radically Other. We could indeed object that it is not because they are women that they have to situate themselves there, but only because they situate themselves there that they are called women." Colette Soler, *What Lacan Said about Women: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. John Holland (New York: Other Press, 2006), 301.

15. The relationship between symbolic identity and politicized subjectivity presents us with an either/or choice along the lines of that offered by the relationship between the visible field and the gaze. As Jacques Lacan's analysis of Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* reveals, one can either see the entirety of the visible field minus the gaze (the two world travelers in the painting and their many belongings), or one can see the gaze (the skull at their feet that becomes visible as a skull only when one looks at it from the top and right). Because the gaze requires us to look at an extreme angle, we lose sight of the rest of the visual field. Likewise, politicized subjectivity requires that we put symbolic identity out of consideration.

16. This term was coined by Jason Clemence (Tufts University).

17. Despite the film's generally negative characterization of gardening, there is another side to the treatment of Justin's hobby. It is Justin's constant gardening that renders him amenable to the transition that Tessa effects on him. The care and constancy that gardening demands separates Justin from other figures in the film like Sandy and Sir Bernard, who are hopelessly removed from any possible politicization. Despite Sandy's attraction to Tessa, he is not at all taken in by her political drive but just wants her silenced. To be a "constant gardener" like Justin is to succumb to an ideological relation to time, but it is also to be on the verge of breaking from it.

18. Another variation on the equation of gardening with the submission to symbolic restrictions and official ideology occurs in Hal Ashby's *Being There* (1979). In this film, Chance the Gardener (Peter Sellers) utters mindless bromides about gardening that the public perceives as genuine philosophical insights precisely because the requirements of gardening fit so well with the structure of ideology.

19. In contrast to films such as *The Constant Gardener* and Alejandro González Iñárritu's *21 Grams* (2003), Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002), and Greg Marcks's *11:14* (2003) use an atemporal narration structured around a traumatic event that is overtly present rather than absent. This aesthetic decision creates a vastly

different film: whereas in the former films one can recognize and experience the trauma through its absence, in the latter films the excessive presence of the trauma distorts its significance and renders the spectator incapable of properly experiencing it. One can divide the atemporal mode on the question of the relationship that films take up to the depiction of the traumatic event. Todd Phillips's *The Hangover* (2009) straddles the line between the two. It initially leaves the traumatic night of wild debauchery in Las Vegas as an absence that shapes the events that occur in the filmic discourse, but then the film concludes with a series of still photographs depicting what happened. Because the still images provide the only access to the traumatic night, it remains out of time for both the spectator and the characters in the film.

20. Tessa's response to Justin's show of understanding seems wildly inappropriate. At the moment he stands up to the crowd and accepts her critique, her outrage increases. This exchange reveals the film's attention to the precise point at which politics is located in what we say. It is not, as Tessa's response indicates, in the enunciated content of what we say but in the point of enunciation, the point from which we speak. From the position that Justin occupies in this scene, any acceptance of the critique will serve an ideological function.

21. There are contemporary physicists working in the field of quantum gravity who theorize that time is just an illusion produced by our experience, but this results in an expansion of difference rather than an embrace of sameness. The rejection of time thus ironically has almost the same effect as the emergence of Deleuze's time-image. For instance, in the conclusion of *The End of Time*, Julian Barbour claims, "I see no fundamental line of time and causal evolution along which we march as robots; each experienced Now is new and distinct." Julian Barbour, *The End of Time: The Next Revolution in Physics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 333.

22. I am indebted to Anna Kornbluh (University of Illinois, Chicago) for this point and for others throughout the essay.

23. The insistence on the singularity of one's drive is the opposite of a retreat into private life. It is instead correlative to an intervention in a universal political field. As Slavoj Žižek notes, "one is truly universal only when radically singular, in the interstices of communal identities." Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2008), 200.

24. For psychoanalysis, as for Hegel, the infinite nature of subjectivity emerges only in response to its finite condition. Its infinity has no proper existence outside finitude, unlike the infinity of God.

25. As Giorgio Agamben points out in several books, bare or naked life has become the predominant ideological structure today, and it specifically works to prohibit politicization. Agamben claims, "naked life, which was the hidden foundation of sovereignty, has meanwhile become the dominant form of life everywhere. Life—in its state of exception that has now become the norm—is the naked life that in every context separates the forms of life from their cohering into

a form-of-life." Giorgio Agamben, *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 6.

5. "Something Is Lost"

1. Edelman, *No Future*, 11.

2. Though the film never shows Jack accepting his friend's offer of a drink or drinking, the implication is that he eventually does decide to drink again and that this leads to the accident, though the film does leave room for some ambiguity on this point.

3. Even the film's dedication—"Pues cuando ardió la pérdida, reverdecieron sus maizales" ["Then when the loss burned, their cornfields became green again"]—juxtaposes loss and gain to the benefit of the latter.

4. Allan Cameron, "Contingency, Order, and the Modular Narrative: *21 Grams* and *Irreversible*," *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006): 73.

5. Iñárritu's films—*Amores Perros* (2000), *21 Grams*, and *Babel* (2006)—are among the purest instances of atemporal cinema. This is especially true of the latter two films. Whereas others films in this mode sometimes have recourse to aspects of the story that instigate a temporal shift (like a procedure for the elimination of traumatic memories or a disorder that prevents the main character from forming short term memories), Iñárritu's three films offer no such alibi for their distortions of time. As a result, this distortion gains in significance in his films, though to different ends in each film. Whereas in *21 Grams* atemporality reveals the primacy of loss, in *Amores Perros* it shows how the traumatic event completely transforms the coordinates of the characters' lives, and in *Babel* atemporality makes clear the role that contingency has in our relations to each other.

6. Though the narrative structure of *21 Grams*, like that of many contemporary films, challenges traditional expectations, the narrative structure alone has no necessary relationship to ideology. An unusual narrative structure can function ideologically or not, depending on the use to which the filmmaker puts it. As Brian Richardson notes, "It is clear that no form has any inherent essence or tendency—or at least none that a competent practitioner cannot readily circumvent. Ideological stances are frequently associated with practices of narration, but to affirm that there is a simple progressive or conservative 'essence' to any particular technique is certainly erroneous." Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), 73.

7. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 52.

8. In *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell argues that even the art film, the film that rejects the classical narrative structure, nonetheless follows the trajectory from nonknowledge to knowledge, despite the fact that this

trajectory occurs on a different interpretive level than it does in the case of classical narration. He says, "The art film is nonclassical in that it creates permanent narrational gaps and calls attention to processes of fabula construction. But these very deviations are placed within new extrinsic norms, resituated as realism or authorial commentary. Eventually, the art-film narration solicits not only denotative comprehension but also connotative reading, a higher-level interpretation." David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 212.

9. Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 115. The modernist novel provides numerous examples of narratives that thwart the move toward completeness, and one might see *21 Grams* as following in this tradition. As numerous narrative theorists have pointed out, the conclusions constructed by Joyce, Woolf, Proust, or Faulkner do not provide the reader with a sense of completion but rather stress the fragmentary or incomplete status of narrative structure as such. But the modernist novel links the break from chronological time to a temporality of the subject's inner consciousness. According to Ken Ireland, "Novels of the 1920s by Proust, Joyce and Woolf, Faulkner and Thomas Mann thematize time, thereby displacing traditional plot, as well as emphasizing inwardness and the activity of individual consciousness" (Ken Ireland, *The Sequential Dynamics of Narrative: Energies at the Margins of Fiction* [Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001], 23). *21 Grams*, in contrast, depicts this break occurring in action—through the subject enacting repetition.

10. Unlike other narratives focusing on trauma, *21 Grams* does not create an uncertain temporality or what David Herman labels a "fuzzy temporality." Herman argues that "refusing to assign situations and events a definite location in time can, in some contexts, highlight the difficulty of narrating traumatic occurrences" (David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002], 219–20). The narrative of *21 Grams* doesn't produce uncertainty about when the events take place. Though the events occur out of chronological order, the spectator can, without too much difficulty, reconstruct the proper chronology by the end of the film. The film mixes up chronological time in order to reveal the precise relationship between trauma and time: subjects look to chronological time to provide an escape from the traumatic event, but they never escape the event's hold.

11. I am indebted to Robyn Warhol (Ohio State University) for this point and others throughout the chapter.

12. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (I), trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 111.

13. Jacques Lacan renames Freud's navel of the dream the "real," and he extends this concepts beyond the dream to every signifying system. Like the navel of the dream, the real is the point within every signifying structure that defies signification. It holds the structure together at the same time as it remains an exceptional point within that structure.

14. As Paul Eisenstein has it, "If trauma conditions the existence of the finite world, it also constitutes the nature and being of finite subjects or that world. There is thus no way for us to live an intelligible moment that is not indebted to structural trauma." Paul Eisenstein, *Traumatic Encounters: Holocaust Representation and the Hegelian Subject* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 56.

15. Insofar as *21 Grams* presents the traumatic event as a present absence, it sustains Cathy Caruth's notion of an ethics of memory that respects the irreducibility of trauma to the signifier without avoiding its signification altogether. Caruth contends that trauma "must . . . be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding." Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5.

16. Warhol further classifies "events that defy narrative, foregrounding the inadequacy of language or of visual image to achieve full representation, even of fictitious events" as "supranarratable," a category located within the unnarratable. Robyn Warhol, "Neonarrative; or, How to Render the Unnarratable in Realist Fiction and Contemporary Film," in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, eds. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 223.

17. The idea behind *Lantana* is not that thinking atemporally will save one's life. There are obviously times when temporal thinking—viewing trauma as a contingent possibility that might come—will serve one's self-interests better than atemporal thinking that views loss as constitutive. But the appeal of the atemporal position is not centered on how well it serves our interests.

18. The filmic antecedent of *Lantana* is not another atemporal film like *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) or *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), but Robert Altman's multilayered *Short Cuts* (1993), in which various contingent events connect the lives of disparate individuals.

19. Lawrence does not create a moral indictment of the Somers characters and her actions in the film, but rather shows that they are completely understandable. One of the film's primary story lines involves the struggle of Somers and her husband to deal with the recent murder of their daughter, and this murder clearly leads Somers to see a danger where none existed.

20. Film's regime of visibility tends to create what Walter Benjamin famously calls "a homogeneous, empty time." Benjamin links the concept of temporal progress to the homogeneity of time and sees it as the enemy of singularity. His vision of the task of the historical materialist involves rejecting this homogeneous movement of time by affirming the present as a moment when time ceases to flow. Only in this way does the acknowledgment of singularity become possible. This is also the task that atemporal cinema (and especially *21 Grams*) takes up. See Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938–1940*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 389–400.

21. One might recuperate the much-maligned category of authenticity along the lines of the successful failure. Authenticity does not consist in fully grasping

one's condition—one's being-toward-death, for instance—but in recognizing one's constitutive inability to do so. The authentic subject would be the one who has no illusions about her/his inability to live without illusions.

22. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume Three*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1981), 297.

23. In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke insists on the power of the rigid designator to confirm identity. He says, "Let's call something a *rigid designator* if in every possible world it designates the same object." Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 48.

24. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973), 231. Of course, money existed before the onset of capitalism. But it is only with the emergence of capitalist relations of production that money becomes the general form of wealth and thereby begins to serve as the basis for social relations. As Marx points out, money functions as an excess that threatens the coherence of premodern societies, and then it becomes the foundation that produces coherence in modern societies. Its role relative to society undergoes a complete revolution as capitalism is born.

25. Georg Simmel notes that the constancy of money permits it to play a crucial role in stabilizing the process of exchange. He notes that the "ability of money to replace every specific economic value . . . assures the continuity of the series of economic events." Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 2nd ed., trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, ed. David Frisby (New York: Routledge, 1990), 124.

26. The point is not that organ donation in itself has an ideological function within capitalist relations of production, but that the process that it demands fits the ideological structure of capitalism almost perfectly.

27. Bonnie Hunt's *Return to Me* (2000) is another contemporary film that takes up the question of organ donation and the logic of exchange. But this film goes much further toward embracing this equation than *Dirty Pretty Things*, which—despite its formal nod to general exchangeability—sustains a clear critique against the predominance of the market and its logic over all aspects of existence. In contrast, *Return to Me* suggests that Bob Rueland (David Duchovny) falls in love with Grace Briggs (Minnie Driver) because she has the heart of his deceased wife and thereby provides an adequate compensation for the loss of her.

28. The fact that one registers loss as absolute doesn't imply that one will never seek vengeance, but it does imply that one will never seek vengeance in the way that most people do, believing that vengeance will provide some degree of recompense for what has been lost. In *21 Grams*, after initially refusing to press charges against Jack, Cristina does ask Paul to avenge the death of her husband and daughters. But she does not do so with the expectation of recompense, which is why she can so easily give up all thoughts of vengeance at the end of the film.

29. Every editing choice in a linear film has a thematic function in the same way, but the demands of linear storytelling operate as a fetish, disguising the

thematic function under the power of chronology. The nonlinear film lays bare the thematic nature of editing choices as such.

30. Walter A. Davis, *Deracination: Historicity, Hiroshima, and the Tragic Imperative* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 169.

31. Through the figure of Jack, Iñárritu shows the structural similarity of evangelical Christianity and American gangs. Though only the latter proclaim an explicit Prosperity Gospel, the idea that wealth follows from one's devotion to the group ideal animates both.

32. For an analysis of the conclusion of *Minority Report* in terms of Spielberg's entire career as a filmmaker, see Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

33. The image of a pregnant Cristina takes on its signification by virtue of its location within the narrative. It has no direct content separable from this positioning, which is why Geoff King's contrast of the film's stereotypical content with its form—"The form is radical, by mainstream standards, but the content is closer to the more familiar stuff of melodrama"—misses the mark (Geoff King, "Weighing Up the Qualities of Independence: *21 Grams* in Focus," *Film Studies* 5 [2004]: 87). The form of the film demands that the spectator experience the content in a way that defies the "conventional" label that King applies to it.

6. Timeless in Space

1. Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato: The Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1241.

2. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger says, "The meaning of the being of that being we call Da-sein proves to be *temporality.*" Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 15.

3. Derrida attempts to immerse his thought in time to such an extent that he rejects any anchoring of thought relative to the movement of time. For Derrida, Heidegger doesn't go far enough in his assertion of Dasein's temporality because he clings to the possibility of an authentic mode of existing in time through assuming one's being-toward-death. Such a position must be, as Derrida sees it, a holdover from Plato's installation of eternity as the point of departure for all thinking about time. He sees how time's radical uprooting renders authentic being-toward-death false. He asks, "Who will guarantee that the name, the ability to name death (like that of naming the other, and it is the same) does not participate as much in the dissimulation of the 'as such' of death as in its revelation, and that language is not precisely the origin of the nontruth of death, and of the other?" Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 76.

4. Benjamin's notion of messianic time—an eternal moment existing outside of historical progress that accumulates everything left behind by the forward movement of history—has paved the theoretical way for the various recuperations

of eternity by Badiou, Agamben, and Žižek. In the case of Agamben and Žižek, the debt to Benjamin is explicit within their thought.

5. Jacques Lacan's term for the rehabilitation of eternity is the real, which resists the change that occurs during the passage of time. As he describes it, "the real is what introduces the same, or more exactly, the real is what always returns to the same place" Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre IX: L'identification, 1961–1962*, unpublished manuscript, session of May 30, 1962 (my translation).

6. As *Out of Sight* figures it, love produces a rupture not only within time, but also within the social fabric. Though love often functions ideologically, it also permits subjects to transcend their symbolic identity. It does this in *Out of Sight*, just as it does in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004) and *The Constant Gardener* (Fernando Meirelles, 2005).

7. In *The Violent Woman*, Hilary Neroni notes that it is only the idea of a time-out that makes possible a romance between a violent woman and a man. The violent woman renders visible the sexual antagonism and thus cannot serve as a romantic partner unless some kind of rupture in the fabric of time occurs. For the full exploration of this idea, see Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

8. Chow, who is a writer, appears to be the author of the story of 2046, though there is no definitive word in the film that everything that we see concerning 2046 is just a visualization of what Chow has written. In fact, the early scenes depicting the train to 2046 occur before any mention of Chow writing such a story.

9. Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 279. Though Stavrakakis quarrels with Slavoj Žižek at times in *The Lacanian Left*, this belief that radical political change depends on abandoning an investment in the possibility of desire's realization represents common ground between them. For Žižek as well, the fantasy that one might actually obtain the object that would answer one's desire is the key to the continued domination of the capitalist mode of production.

10. The restructuring of desire that occurs in *2046* resembles the dialectical movement that occurs in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel is constantly at pains to show how the solution to philosophical problems does not lie in a future discovery, but within the problem itself. The problem is already its solution when seen in the right way. For Wong Kar Wai, the proper understanding of desire allows us to see that it has already been realized through its very emergence.

11. The temporal status of the signifier "2046" is implicitly suggested by the particular number itself: 2046 is not simply a random year in the future but the final year of the Chinese agreement to allow Hong Kong to retain its current political status. Understood in this way, 2046 marks an epochal moment of change occurring in time.

12. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 97. Deleuze inherently privileges the virtual over the possible precisely because actualization never completely exhausts the difference of the virtual, while realization does fully take up everything that the possible offers. This privileging follows from Deleuze's effort to think the problem of difference rather than the problem of sameness.

13. In *2046*, it does seem as if one can actually live only on the Christmas holidays and avoid the rest of the year, as the only days that the film designates through intertitles are consecutive Christmas Eves. This is yet another way in which Wong treats time like space.

14. One can examine the subject's tendency to sabotage itself in light of the insight into enjoyment that *2046* provides. By keeping the realization of desire at a distance, self-sabotage allows the subject to continue to enjoy itself and avoid the dissatisfaction inherent in perfect satisfaction.

15. Following Jacques Lacan, I capitalize "Other" here and in the discussion that ensues in order to indicate that the subject addresses this Other as a figure of authority. The Other can thus indicate one person or the anonymous opinion of society as a whole (like Heidegger's "the They"). Love shows these two forms of the Other functioning in opposition to each other. The subject in love replaces the Other of anonymous social opinion with an individual Other whose word becomes more important than that of the society at large.

16. The inaccessibility of the first Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung) is the focus of Wong Kar Wai's earlier film, *In the Mood for Love* (2000), which recounts the burgeoning love between Su Li Zhen and Chow. The two are living next door to each other with neighboring families in an apartment building, and they gradually discover that their spouses are both having affairs. Despite the clear indication of love existing between them, *In the Mood for Love* does not show them consummating their relationship, leaving this ambiguous for the spectator.

17. Chow insists on paying Bai Ling even though she doesn't demand—or want—money because the exchange of money leaves her in the position of a dissatisfying commodity rather than a satisfying lost object. Chow has recourse to capitalist exchange in order to avoid the possibility of leaving the logic of desire for that of the drive. In this way, *2046* reveals the existential appeal of capitalism.

18. *The Holiday* (Nancy Meyers, 2006) exemplifies the standard use of titles at the end of the romantic comedy, and *Angels and Demons* (Ron Howard, 2009) does so during the suspenseful moments of the thriller. In both cases, the titles work to create an awareness of time passing.

19. Intertitles or subtitles indicating time sometimes appear in contemporary atemporal films, and when they do, they tend to lessen the disruption of temporality and thus recreate the temporal experience of the cinema for the spectator. This is the case, for example, with Sidney Lumet's *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007).

20. By showing the absence of any fundamental change at the point where we would most expect it, *2046* seems to be a conservative film, and the brief newsreel footage of political unrest in Hong Kong appears to support this conservatism. Though Chow notes the political situation in Hong Kong, he never focuses on it and tends to deploy it as a backdrop for his amorous adventures. But the film's attack on hope for change actually allows us to see political activity in a different light. Whereas the intertitles contrast with the film's visuals, the newsreel footage of political activity in Hong Kong exists in parallel with them. Just as *2046* asks the spectators to recognize where their enjoyment lies, it depicts political activity as an end in itself, not as a vehicle for realizing some future vision of society.

21. The image of Chow at his writing desk is not an instance of Deleuze's time-image. In the time-image, time ceases to be subordinate to movement, but movement isn't completely absent as it is in this scene from *2046*. By correlating an absence of movement with titles indicating that time is advancing, Wong creates a sense of contrast between the image and time.

22. This visual style doesn't really become fully developed in Wong's filmmaking until *Fa yeung nin wa* (*In the Mood for Love*, 2000). In earlier films such as *A Fei zheng chuan* (*Days of Being Wild*, 1990) or *Duo luo tian shi* (*Fallen Angels*, 1995), excess within the images is not yet counterbalanced by absence. *In the Mood for Love* marks a clear break in his career, and the new form remains prominent in the follow-up to *2046*, *My Blueberry Nights* (2007), even though this film, Wong's first English-language film, is hampered by a compromised ending in which the object becomes attainable.

23. The idea that illusions don't hide the mysterious unknown but the already known echoes the pronouncement of Angier (Hugh Jackman) at the end of *The Prestige* (Christopher Nolan, 2006), who claims that magic allows people to believe in something they know to be false.

24. The role of absence in the visual field is even more pronounced in *In the Mood for Love* than in its quasi-sequel *2046*. In the former film, Wong constantly returns to shots of a hallway in which walls and doorways impede the spectator's view of Chow and Su Li Zhen (Maggie Cheung). Just as their love is nurtured by an absence of sexual contact, the spectator's desire is triggered by what can't be seen.

25. As with every other film, there is no empirical proper spectator for *2046*, but, also like every other film, its structure inherently posits its own proper spectator. The film demands a certain mode of spectatorship.

26. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 38.

27. The movement from particular other to particular other that sustains *the* Other is visible in the progression of masters that one often sees intellectuals undergo. One begins with Foucault as one's master, then turns to Lacan, then to Badiou, and so on. The master remains a master only as long as he appears

to have a secret knowledge, and at the moment this illusion disappears, a new master emerges. But at no point does the assumption that the Other indeed has a secret lose its hold.

7. Affirmation of the Lost Object

1. Perhaps the most well-known film to intertwine individual and national destiny is Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* (1994). Here, the point is not so much to chronicle historical progress through the destiny of an individual, but to contrast the corruption and decline of American society with the steadiness of the traditional morality that Gump embodies. Gump himself is what stays the same as history moves, and what stays the same, as Zemeckis's film imagines it, is not the loss associated with the drive but the ground that commonsensical morality provides for the nation.

2. The link between nation and the forward movement of time supports Susan Hayward's claim that "it seems more than appropriate that cinema was born in [the] age of nationalism." Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 5.

3. The temporal structure of *Peppermint Candy* is the same as *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), which was released in the same year, though the latter film includes more sequences and intersperses them with sequences moving forward in time chronologically. Both films have short scenes where the film actually runs backward, the shots from the back of the train in *Peppermint Candy* and the opening murder in *Memento*. In *Peppermint Candy* these scenes play a crucial thematic role; in *Memento* the opening scene acts more as a signal to the spectator of the film's disruption of the traditional conception of temporality.

4. In the booklet for the English-language version of the DVD, Lee goes so far as to include a description of the main events in Korean history that were happening at the time of the film's seven sequences. This has the effect of ensuring that even the spectator not at all familiar with Korean history will be able to grasp the link between the trajectory of Yong-Ho's life and that of the Korean nation.

5. Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, "*Peppermint Candy*: The Will *Not* To Forget," in *New Korean Cinema*, eds. Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 161.

6. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 26.

7. The link between the development of the nation and the emergence of capitalism as the controlling economic structure is forged through a shared foundation in forward moving time. Both nation and capital demand constant progress toward a new and different future.

8. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 205.

9. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 21.

10. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 87.

11. Rorty goes on to contend that the increase in imaginative power has the ability "to make the human future richer than the human past" (Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 87). Though Rorty leaves the concept of richness undefined, he clearly means by it an easing of access to objects of desire for an increasing number of subjects. Those who have contributed to increasing the richness of human existence, for Rorty, include Newton, Christ, Marx, contemporary feminists, and the American Founding Fathers—all figures who have worked to topple barriers existing between subjects and the objects of their desire.

12. The necessary tendency of progress to produce a recoil from progress is what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer call the "dialectic of enlightenment." Though psychoanalysis shares the Enlightenment's investment in the product of truth and the power of truth to change human relations, it breaks from the Enlightenment concerning the idea of progress. It is the failure of the progress triggered by the Enlightenment that gives birth to the project of psychoanalysis.

13. Lacan accords the objet petit a both a real and an imaginary status. In terms of the real, this object is impossible and exists only insofar as it is lost. But the subject does nonetheless encounter imaginary representatives of the objet petit a, and that is that status of peppermint candy in the film.

14. In an earlier scene, Yong-Ho also leaves behind the camera that he always wanted and that Sun-Im offers to him as a present. Because he turns his affections from Sun-Im to Hong-Ja, he rejects the gift, which has a significance related to that of the peppermint candy. Not only does photography represent Yong-Ho's passion, but it also functions in the film as a rejection of forward-moving temporality. The instant that the photograph captures does not exist within the forward movement of time but instead marks a different modality of time, one that focuses on what is lost rather than what might be gained.

15. Colette Soler, *What Lacan Said about Women: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. John Holland (New York: Other Press, 2006), 159.

16. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre VIII: Le transfert, 1960–1961*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 53 (my translation).

17. Another superb rejection of paranoia about the nation in contemporary cinema occurs in the third film chronicling the life of amnesiac CIA assassin Jason Bourne (Matt Damon). At the conclusion of *The Bourne Ultimatum* (Paul Greengrass, 2007), Bourne finally remembers his initiation into the CIA assassination training program. It begins with him deciding to shoot a bound and hooded man with no justification other than that doing so will help to protect his country.

18. By placing Sun-Im in the position of the anonymous protester, Lee links leftist political struggle with the individual subject's desire. Just as an investment in national identity requires the abandonment of one's lost object, a genuine leftist commitment to the struggle for equality and against social injustice demands, as the film sees it, a devotion to one's lost object.

19. Though almost everyone in the film besides Yong-Ho seems reconciled with the social order in which they exist, this is an illusion of perspective. Yong-Ho is more alienated than the others, but it is only from his perspective that they lack any alienation at all. If the film took up the perspective of, say, another person at the reunion, the spectator would see the fundamental alienation of the subject take a different form, but it would remain visible.

20. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 202.

21. Though it depicts the brutality of the torture and the role of this brutality in forming a national identity, *Peppermint Candy* also stresses how torture never succeeds in forming this identity without a remainder. This is indicated after the torture scene. During that scene, the man tortured by Yong-Ho defecates on Yong-Ho's hand as he endures the violence. Immediately afterward, we see Yong-Ho attempting to wash his hand to rid himself of the unwanted reminder, but his fellow officers tell him that no amount of cleaning ever erases the smell entirely. The smell of the union organizer's feces forever undermines the project of national identity trying to eradicate the working class.

22. I am indebted to Hyon Joo Yoo (University of Vermont) for this point and for acquainting me with various details of South Korean history that have informed this analysis of *Peppermint Candy*.

23. Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 5.

24. Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 131.

25. Lynne Kirby sees the parallel between the cinema and the railroad in other terms. According to her, the cinema spectator's interaction with the screen has an antecedent in the train passenger. In *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, she says, "As a *perceptual* paradigm, the railroad established a new, specifically modern mode of perception that the cinema absorbed naturally. In other words, the kind of perception that came to characterize the passenger on the train became that of the spectator in the cinema." Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 7.

26. The first filmmaker to make the train the explicit subject of cinematic exploration was, of course, Buster Keaton. Through there is a clear relationship between Keaton's train films, like *Our Hospitality* (1923), and *Peppermint Candy*, Keaton focuses on the train in order to reveal the tenuousness of its temporal and spatial regime, whereas Lee shows the train as an almost omnipotent force against which one must struggle.

27. In the first two *American Pie* films, a character makes a toast to "the next step," indicating an investment in the possibilities of the future. This same toast is interrupted in the third film because, as the film sees it, there is no step beyond marriage, which is the consummation of temporal development and the ultimate satisfaction. Here, the ideology of the romantic union and the investment in

temporality reveal their full kinship. (I owe this point to Jason Clemence [Tufts University].)

28. Though Roger Avary was a close collaborator with Quentin Tarantino and his co-writer on *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), the attitude that his film takes toward the atemporal mode is completely opposed to that of his former friend. Whereas Tarantino takes up this mode in order to affirm the fecundity of time itself, Avary works to show that time only serves as a site for repetition. In this sense, Avary, unlike his former video store coworker, genuinely belongs in the atemporal mode, at least in *Rules of Attraction*.

29. In the other reverse chronology film of the atemporal mode, *Irréversible* (Gaspar Noé, 2002), there are no sequences in which the film runs backward, despite its many formal flourishes.

30. In the film's most famous sequence, a montage of Victor's trip to Europe, Avary compresses many dramatic events—romance in Paris, drug use in the Netherlands, and so on—into a four-minute sequence that reduces each event to a brief audio and visual description. This has the effect of further undermining the newness of time. Rather than being a series of memorable moments each standing out in its singularity, the European trip becomes a blur of indistinguishable experiences. The rapid montage transforms the would-be particularities of the trip into a series of repetitions.

31. A similar disruption of a group's nostalgia by the main characters in a film occurs in David Mirkin's *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion* (1997). Though the disruption is comic rather than tragic, the performance of Romy and Michele puts an end to the possibility for nostalgic enjoyment at the reunion.

8. The Temporal Flight from Trauma

1. J. Hoberman, "Formal Attire: Minimalist Journeys and Maximum Overdrive," *The Village Voice* (10 March 2003): http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0310,hoberman,42267,20.html.

2. David Edelstein, "*Irreversible* Errors: Gaspar Noé's Cinematic Rape," *Slate* (7 March 2003): http://www.slate.com/id/2079782.

3. A public screening of the film arranged by a film student at the University of Vermont, where I teach, was actually stopped by campus authorities, who came to the screening room and informed the student that he didn't have proper permission to show the film. As far as I know, this has happened with no other film during my time at the university.

4. David Sterritt, "'Time Destroys All Things': An Interview with Gaspar Noé," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24 (2007): 311.

5. Whereas Hitchcock uses close-ups of characters' backs or of a dark trunk to disguise cuts and allow multiple shots to appear as a single shot, Noé uses match cuts (often in extreme darkness) to create the effect of seamlessness.

6. The identity of the man whom Pierre kills in the bar is not entirely clear, and it is possible for the spectator to imagine that Pierre does avenge Alex and kill the rapist. But the film introduces enough doubt that no one could be certain about this conclusion.

7. *11:14* does not undermine the initial immediate experience of trauma to the extent that *Irréversible* does because it does not encourage a misreading of the events to the same extent. While watching *11:14*, the spectator simply has no real sense of the nature of what's happening, while *Irréversible* lures the spectator into a misunderstanding.

8. Through its conception of mediation as the broadening of trauma rather than the diluting of it, *Irréversible* takes up the position of Hegel's philosophy. For Hegel, we don't employ mediation after the traumatic fact in order to deal with the trauma but instead approach trauma in the first place through mediation. Without mediation, we have no path for accessing the trauma at all, and believing that trauma is absolutely anterior to mediation allows us to paint an image of mediation that is too sentimental. Mediation doesn't relieve us of the horror of death, for instance, but allows us to tarry with it in our everyday lives.

9. This is the problem that besets the championing of the extreme situation, a practice common among many existentialists of the twentieth century. Such figures believe that experiences such as the intensity of war or the passion of one's first sexual encounter provide a unique insight into the human condition. Whereas we live our everyday lives sheltered from the harsh truths of existence, such experiences strip away our defenses and expose us to being itself in its unadulterated state. But isolating "real" existence in this way serves as its own form of defense: it allows proponents of the extreme situation to avoid seeing the terrors and the passions that populate everyday life. Everyday life becomes in this way of thinking a successful respite, while in fact it is marked by a failure to offer any substantial protection from the pain and joy of existing.

10. Both the traumatic events of *Irréversible* occur in spaces that, though they are public, are underground. They take place in the repressed part of the public space, where the regulating authority of the Other ceases to underwrite social relations. This becomes clear during the rape of Alex, as someone enters the underground passage, sees the rape in progress, and quickly walks away in order to avoid confrontation.

11. Even earlier in the diegetic time of the film, the film further links Marcus to the rape by focusing on his aggression while he and Alex are having sex.

12. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 77.

13. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Boston: Kluwer, 1991), 151.

14. The critique that Henri Bergson and his chief inheritor Gilles Deleuze articulate against phenomenology does not take issue with its prioritizing of experience.

In fact, the vitalist objection to phenomenology takes issue with the way that phenomenology's insistence on the subject as the center of experience illuminating things actually fails to capture what occurs in experience. That is, for Bergson and Deleuze, phenomenology isn't sufficiently devoted to experience. As they see it, our consciousness is not a light that shines on things but a dark screen that interrupts the light coming to it from things.

15. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th ed., trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 131.

16. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 134. Though Heidegger celebrates Kant for his great insight into the temporality of knowledge in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he also criticizes Kant for abandoning this conception in the second edition of that work. Kant's revised version of the first *Critique* downplays the role of the transcendental power of imagination and gives more power to the understanding, which paves the way for the systematic Neo-Kantianism propagated by Ernst Cassirer (whom Heidegger famously confronted in the Davos disputation in 1929).

17. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 200.

18. Bergson largely shares Heidegger's position. In *Matter and Memory*, he notes, "To recognize a common object is mainly to know how to use it." Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 93.

19. Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 22.

20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 421.

21. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 202. Because phenomenology identifies the subject with temporality, it sees subjectivity as fundamentally directed toward the new rather than toward repetition. This is the source of the radical dispute between phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Whereas psychoanalysis conceives subjects as beings driven to repeat the same failure, phenomenology views subjects as beings seeking and constantly encountering the new, which emerges at every moment. As Husserl puts it, "The primal impression is something absolute unmodified, the primal source of all further consciousness and being. Primal impression has as its content that which the word 'now' signifies, insofar as it is taken in the strictest sense. Each new now is the content of a new primal impression." Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 70.

22. With its focus on the timelessness of the signifier, structuralism moves in the opposite direction from phenomenology. Phenomenology tries to ground the subject in time; structuralism tries to reduce subjectivity to the synchrony of the

signifying order. In this sense, it represents a countercurrent to the emphasis on time that characterizes twentieth-century thought.

23. In his atemporal film *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009), Steven Soderbergh associates experience with the process of capitalist exchange. The film's protagonist, Chelsea (Sasha Grey) is an upper-class prostitute who sells her clients the experience of an interested and attentive girlfriend. As the title of the film suggests, experience is not the authentic basis of our existence, but just another commodity that can be bought and sold. Eventually the film shows Chelsea herself being misled by an experience with a client, when she believes that this particular experience has transcended its commodity form.

24. A similar formal shift occurs in Harold Ramis's *Groundhog Day* (1993). There, Phil Connors (Bill Murray) relives the same day (February 2, the titular date) over and over again, despite attempts to leave the town where the day is repeated and even despite several successful suicides. Time in *Groundhog Day* does not move forward. Though the initial situation (being stuck in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania) is obviously not traumatic in the same sense as killing a child in a hit-and-run accident, the incessant repetition of the same day becomes so. In *Groundhog Day*, repetition itself becomes the source of trauma, and this is the source of the film's genius. But the repetition ends when Phil turns to helping others and becoming a giving, compassionate human being. The turn is similar to the one that occurs in *The Machinist* and shares the latter film's Christian overtones, but it revolves around a turn away from narcissism rather than a confession of sins.

25. Allan Cameron, "Contingency, Order, and the Modular Narrative: *21 Grams* and *Irréversible*," *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (2006): 70. Cameron's objection to the film's depiction of gay sex does not lead him to dismiss the film. In fact, his comment about this depiction becomes the launching pad for his praise of the film's portrait of the role that contingency plays in structuring our experience.

26. Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 107.

27. Judith Roof, *Come As You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xxvii.

28. Eugenie Brinkema, "Rape and the Rectum: Bersani, Deleuze, Noé," *Camera Obscura* 20, no. 1 (2005): 45.

29. Riccardo de los Rios and Robert Davis, "Digital Frames and Visible Grain: Spatial and Material Reintegration in *Irréversible*," *Film Criticism* 32, no. 1 (2007): 106.

30. Noé indicates atemporal closure through the format of the DVD version of the film. All of the chapter titles except the first and last correspond to the time of the events that occur in the chapter. The first chapter title reads "--:--" and the last chapter (depicting Alex in the park) reads "88:88." This digital readout for the final chapter marks a refusal to name an actual time, and it thus locates Alex's

enjoyment in the last scene out of time. (I am indebted to Jason Clemence [Tufts University] for this point.)

Conclusion

1. In his popular elaboration of relativity theory, Einstein rejects the notion of an infinite universe, though he simultaneously dismisses the idea of a bound universe. He argues for the possibility of a space that "is finite (i.e., of finite volume), and has no bounds." Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, trans. Robert W. Lawson (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1961), 126.

2. Hans Reichenbach, *The Direction of Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 4.

3. The resistance to temporality becomes evident in the negative response to advances in biology as well. The rejection of Darwinian evolution is an attempt not just to dissociate humanity from other species, but to insist on the existence of an eternal human soul that is not subject to development over time. Darwinism is a temporal threat to what is eternal in humanity.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 41.

5. Sigmund Freud, "Negation," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19 (London: Hogarth Press, 1974), 238.

6. Even the idea of eternity, if one genuinely thinks about it, should provide no comfort from the existential horror of time. Though time promises the death of the subject, eternity offers an existence without any possible respite. It conjures up images of punishment rather than relief. Instead of supposing that humanity invented eternity to escape time, it is more credible to assume that humanity invented time to escape eternity.

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Todd McGowan is associate professor of cultural theory and film in the Department of English at the University of Vermont. He is the author of *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan, The Impossible David Lynch*, and *The End of Dissatisfaction?* He also coedited with Sheila Kunkle *Lacan and Contemporary Film*.